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A GIRL OF THE NORTHLAND

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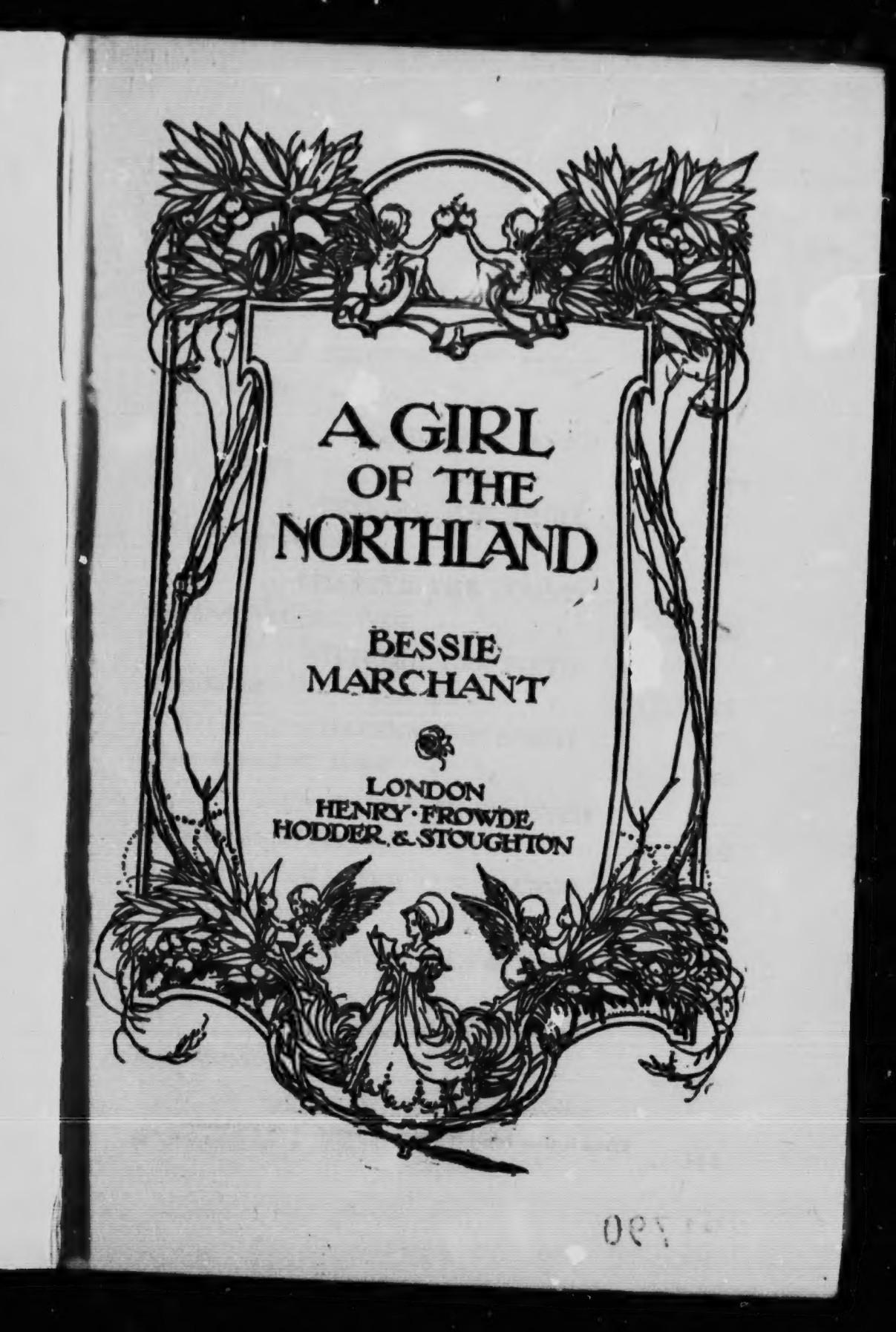
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"'I AM COMING; I AM ALMOST THERE!' SHE EXCLAIMED."

[See page 113.]



A GIRL OF THE NORTHLAND

BESSIE
MARCHANT



LONDON
HENRY·FROWDE
HODDER & STOUGHTON

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CHAPTER THE FIRST

The Letter

'THE mail is in at last, Miss Scarth, and here is your letter, a thick one too, as it ought to be, seeing what a long time you have had to wait for it.'

'Oh, how truly delightful!' cried Olive Scarth, springing to her feet, with shining eyes, and joyful eagerness in her tones. 'But how did the boat manage to get in, with so much ice in the river, Mrs. Baldwin?'

'I can't say how they did it; I only know that it was done. A sailor needs to have a charmed life on this coast, and in this weather,' replied the woman, who had looked in at the sitting-room door to give Olive her letter, and now was hurrying back to some cooking, which had reached a critical stage.

But Olive paid no heed to the remark, probably she had not heard it, being already engrossed with the contents of that bulky envelope.

She had heard nothing from home for nearly two months, and sometimes the longing for news had been so intolerable that [she had felt inclined to drop everything, in order to start off home and see if anything were wrong.

Her eye was caught first by the scrawly

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writing of Benny; then because he was the youngest, and also the very dearest of the home brood, she started by reading his letter:

'DEAR OLIVE,—If you don't come home soon, I shall forget what you are like, and I'm sure you won't know me either, for I'm nearly as big as Bluey, and twice as strong. But when father gets all that money, I expect you will come home to live always.

'Your loving BENNY.'

'Oh, the darling, what a charming letter!' she murmured, pressing her lips to the very biggest blot, while her eyes grew suddenly misty. 'But what does he mean about money? Oh, I wonder, has father's book been accepted?'

She turned over the enclosures in a flutter of agitation: Gretchen's letter, a scrap from Dora, a roughly drawn map dotted with crosses in red and blue, and a big sheet closely filled with her father's small neat writing which was such a joy to read, and which she now began with avidity—

'MY DARLING OLIVE,—I am in sight of immense riches. And standing as it were on the threshold of great wealth, I am hastening to tell you about it, because you have always been my confidante, and have never disappointed me but once, which was at the first, when instead of the son I longed for, you turned out to be just a girl. A fortnight ago I found a man almost dead on the Tayu trail. I brought him home and thawed him

The Letter

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out, but he was too far gone to recover. Before he died, he gave me the map I enclose, and he told me that in the valley marked with the blue cross, the gold is in such abundance, that not even Klondyke nor Bonanza Creek can equal it. He discovered the place last autumn, but remained until winter, because there are miles on miles of morasses, which can only be crossed when they are frozen. Why he stayed all through the winter, instead of coming back when the frost first began, I can't imagine, and although I asked him more than once, he seemed too far gone to tell me. But it means that I must set off at once, or at any rate within the next two weeks, if I am to hope for a chance of pegging out my claim before any one else slips in ahead of me. I have no money for provisioning the little expedition, so can you send me fifty dollars by return of post? If I have the money in hand to pay cash down, I can get off so much quicker, and with less comment. While the sooner I start, the sooner I shall arrive at affluence. Won't it be funny to have a millionaire for your father? And oh, my darling, what glorious times you shall all have when I get rich! The poor book will get a chance of being published then; we might even have an *édition de luxe*. By the way, I've got a new idea, or shall we say a new theory, regarding the influence of the solar rays in determining the tilt of the earth, but more of that anon.

' Your loving father,
' JACOB SCARTH.'

I*

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'So it isn't the book after all, but only a gold find!' exclaimed Olive to herself in deep disappointment. Then the happy smiles faded from her face, and a look of care settled there, making her appear suddenly older.

She was thinking of the money her father wanted to borrow. If she sent it, she would not be able to go home this year for the summer vacation.

Once before the money had been saved, and then it had been needed for Dora, who went in for a scholarship examination, and failed to get it, only just scraping through with a teaching certificate. This time the money had been saved by the severest economy; she had bought nothing for herself, except a pair of stout boots, and part of her board had been worked out in plain sewing, done out of school hours.

However, there was no use in sighing. It was a real privilege to help her dear home-people, and of course it would be truly delightful if her father did make a great gold find.

But the if was such a big one, and there had been so many ifs of a similar kind in the past, that Olive might be forgiven her lack of faith in the new venture.

She darned a good many sober thoughts into the stockings of the young Baldwins that evening, and neither Dora's newsy letter nor the love in Gretchen's untidy scrawl could banish the cloud hanging over her spirits.

A night's rest did much towards driving away the bitter home-sickness, and she awoke

The Letter

II

next morning, ready to face the new day with the cheerful courage which mostly sweetened and beautified her monotonous toil.

The weather, which had been bad yesterday, was worse to-day. A wild storm of wind and rain was raging, the snow was mostly slush, and the ice was breaking up in the river, a full three weeks before its usual time. It was marvellous that the coasting steamer, *Pluck*, should have succeeded in making the journey up to Redway Falls, seeing the amount of ice in the river. During the winter months the boat anchored in the bay, and the mails were brought up on a hand sledge; but that was a longer process, and so directly it was possible, the boat steamed right up to the village.

Olive dressed hurriedly, and not staying for breakfast, went across to the post office to arrange about sending her father the fifty dollars for which he had asked.

To her surprise, the boat had gone, and now there would not be another out-going mail for a week to come.

'But surely the boat went before its time?' she said, with a dismayed wonder as to what her father would think of her.

'Yes, miss, she wasn't due out until noon, but the ice has jammed just below the school-house, with a lot of wood coming down to the sawmill, and the water in the river is getting so low that the captain was afraid the *Pluck* would run aground if he stayed his full time,' said the postmaster, who was also general store-keeper.

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'That is a bad place for a jam surely.' A look of concern crept into Olive's face; she had always thought that the schoolhouse stood too close to the river for safety, and now that so much ice and snow were melting, the danger of a flood was consequently much greater.

'I don't fancy the jam will make much difference, all the while the one above holds,' answered the man. 'You see, there is a jam just below the falls, and that is keeping the water back; if that were to give way before this lower one, I'll admit there might be mischief, but they are going to try getting this one clear away some time to-day, then everything will be safe.'

Olive nodded in entire agreement with this theory, then went back to get her breakfast, thinking a great deal more about her father's possible disappointment in not getting the money, than she did about the likelihood of the wrong jam giving way first. It was so near to school time, that breakfast had to be a very hasty affair, and then she hurried off to school, with the letter from home still in her pocket, although it had been her intention to leave it locked up in her trunk at Mrs. Baldwin's house.

Very few children could get to school this morning. The ten from over the river were all missing, and instead of the thirty-two, whose names were on the roll, there were only fourteen to line up, when Olive called the register.

It was a poor school, and badly found. But the managers did not trouble themselves about

improvements, because there were so few children in the sparsely populated district.

In the pauses of her morning's work, Olive read her father's letter again; then because the envelope was so bulky, and took up so much room in her pocket, she put it in her school desk, until the noon recess.

The tempest wind roared round the little schoolhouse, the rain pelted against the windows, and Olive could faintly hear the shouts of the men, and the sound of heavy blows, as they tried to break the jam and set free the river current. It made her think of Kipling's poem, and she found herself murmuring, as she stood by the blackboard—

'Do you know the blackened timber, do you know that
racing stream,
With the raw right-angled log-jam at the end ?'

'Teacher, the upper jam has broke, and the river is coming down in flood,' called a boy whose seat was down near to the door.

Olive turned sharply, just as a brown line of wet crept under the badly fitting door, and slid swiftly across the dusty floor.

'Order !' she called, in a calm voice of command. 'Get on your hats and coats, children, and the boys who are big enough must carry the little ones through the water.'

She went herself to help in the hasty robes, but before the first coat was buttoned, there came a crash against the door which shook the building, and made the windows rattle.

The children shrieked with fear, and the

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little ones clung about her, sobbing in their terror, and imploring her to take them home. She tried to comfort them, to assure them that they were in no danger, and would be safely through the flood in a few minutes. But she had to do her talking mostly by gestures now, because of the banging and the crashing of ice and timber against the frail wooden walls of the schoolhouse.

She mounted the little ones on the backs of the bigger ones, and carrying poor Hugh Baldwin herself because he was a cripple, and not able to struggle for himself, she marshalled her little force into marching order.

"Now we are ready. I will go first, and we must all cling together; then if one is swept off his feet, we can pull him up again," she said encouragingly; then all clinging together, they moved across the floor, where the water was now ankle deep, to the door.

But alas, and alas, it opened outwards, and although she pulled and tugged with all her might, never an inch could she get it opened. It was jammed fast with the ice or logs outside and the water in the schoolhouse was now almost to her knees.

"The door is jammed fast; we shall have to see if we can get out of the windows," she said, forcing herself to speak in a cheerful, matter-of-fact sort of tone, which instantly calmed the panic of the children.

Perching Hugh on a desk, she dragged another desk, long and heavy, under the windows on the side of the school farthest from

The Letter

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the river, and mounting on to it, took a look outside to see what were their chances of rescue.

But the schoolhouse was an island in a vast lake, where sheets of ice, and logs for the saw-mill careered round and round, crashing into each other, and grinding against the frail wooden walls, with a force which made them shiver and groan, like a ship in a storm.

Away in the distance she could hear the shouts and cries of the men, who, at the risk of their lives, were still at work trying to break down the barrier, which would not let the river go free.

'It is only a case of waiting, children,' she said, drawing her head in from the window, and trying to hearten up the group of shrinking, terrified children. Then she clambered down from her perch, and with the help of the bigger boys, dragged the desks to make a solid platform under the windows; on the top of these were hoisted the forms, and the children were packed on to the top of this ricketty eminence, for the water on the floor was now waist high, and still rising.

Olive made the bigger children take it in turn to lean out of the windows, yelling for help. She had no voice left for shouting herself, and she was fully occupied in comforting the poor frightened mites, who wailed and wailed with fear, and hunger, and cold. The fire in the stove had gone out, with a spluttering and hissing when the water rushed in, and now it was long past noon.

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'Is it possible that people have forgotten the schoolhouse?' she was asking herself, in growing apprehension, as she tried hard to keep her teeth from chattering, and to maintain her face serene. 'But no, the women would not forget, though the men working in fear of their lives on the jam might not remember.'

'Teacher, teacher, there's a boat over there by the maple trees, and it is coming this way!' shouted a boy; then he began waving his arms out of the window, yelling hurrah at the top of his voice, the others joining in with lusty cries of jubilation. But there was only one boat, and fourteen children had to be saved. Could they all be got off in time?

Olive shivered as a log struck the window on the opposite side of the room, crashing through glass and framework, and cannoning against the stove-pipe.

The children paid no heed to this fresh disaster. They were all intently watching the approaching boat, and debating who would be taken off first.

'The youngest will go first, of course,' said Olive, in a tone of calm finality against which there could be no appeal; and lifting the smallest child in her arms, she waited in readiness to drop it into the boat.

'It is Nicky Trent who is rowing,' piped Hugh Baldwin, in his shrill voice, 'and he has got that leaky old boat of Luke Fraser's; it will be like making a voyage in a cabbage-strainer to go far in that thing.'

Olive's face whitened; the danger of the

children was plainly not over yet, and she must safeguard them as much as she could.

'How many can you take at once?' . . . called out, as Nicky carefully backed his boat in under the window.

'Five, six, if they are little ones; but she is letting water a bit, and there must be some one to bail,' he answered; and just then the boat bumped against the schoolhouse wall.

'Five?' gasped Olive, for there were five small children under seven, and Hugh Baldwin a cripple. Then she made up her mind in a hurry, as she carefully lowered the mite she was holding into the boat. 'You will take the babies this time, and Hughie will go with you to bail.'

'No, no, I would rather wait and go with you, please, teacher; I'd be afraid if you were not there,' pleaded Hughie, seizing Olive's drenched skirt, and shaking it vigorously.

'Hush, Hughie, you must go for my sake, laddie; it will be harder for me if I have you to look after,' she whispered in his ear, as she stooped to pass another baby down to Nicky Trent. This was a sturdy toddler of five, who kicked, fought, and scratched with great vigour, under the impression that he was to be drowned straight off.

Olive had used the only argument which had any weight with Hughie; and although there was a piteous look on his upturned face when she lowered him into the boat, he made no further protest, but started bailing the water with Nicky's old leather hat as the loaded

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craft set out on its perilous return voyage.

Those left behind grouped closer about Olive, who felt as if half her burden were lifted now that the small children were off her hands. But it was a long waiting before the boat came back, and all the while the water was still rising.

'Here it comes!' shouted a boy, as for the second time, Nicky Trent came into view, rounding the corner by the maples. There was only a very weak and quavering hurrah sent up this time for they were too cold and wet for shouting now; moreover, the schoolhouse was giving ominous signs of collapse.

'I can only take five this time, because they are bigger,' said Nicky, in a rather breathless fashion, for he had been putting his whole strength into the work of rescue, and was perspiring violently, though he was coatless and wet as water could make him. Then as Olive lowered the third girl from the window into the boat, he said in an urgent tone, 'Do you come this time, Miss Scarth, and leave the boys to come last. They can shift for themselves on bits of boards and that sort of thing if the building goes to pieces; but you are different.'

'I shall not go until the last,' she answered shortly, then made Bobby and Joe Smith crowd in with the girls.

Nicky said no more to urge her to leave, but as he was rowing away he shouted back, 'Chuck the benches out of the window, and get afloat on 'em; the old shanty is going to pieces!'

Putting out all her strength, Olive, with the help of the boys, slid one of the school forms out of the window, and assisting two of the boys on to it, as it floated legs upwards, she gave them a push which sent them clear of the schoolhouse. Now there were only herself and Neal Dobson left, and they set to work getting another form through the window as quickly as possible; but with only one helper, Olive found it a fearfully difficult task.

At last it was out, and then gripping the window-frame with one hand, with the other she helped Neal to get astride the form.

'All right, teacher, I'm there!' he exclaimed, and then there was a fearful crash somewhere behind, the schoolhouse tottered, reeling as if for collapse, and realizing that the boy's one chance of escape lay in getting clear away before the shingles slid down upon him, Olive gave the form a great push, which sent it bobbing out over the water. It was caught in a current then, and whirled along at a great pace.

'Teacher, teacher, you'll be drowned!' shrieked Neal, when he saw that he was drifting too far away for Olive to get out on to his form.

'Better one than two,' she called back, but her words were drowned in the noise of another crash, as half the roof slid down into the water. Then Neal, looking round, gave an exceedingly bitter cry, for Olive had disappeared from the window.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

The Rescue

WHEN the *Pluck* came up the river on the previous day, she had among her half-dozen passengers a quiet-looking young Englishman, who was going up to Skagway by the Portland Canal. He came ashore at Redway Falls, and was standing with several more people by the door of the store, when the captain, who had been handing over the mails, sauntered out to the entrance, and asked one of the bystanders where Mr. Jules Webling lived, as he had a private parcel for him, which had been sent up from Vancouver City.

No one answered, because no one knew, and the captain had to turn back into the store with his question, the quiet young man following unnoticed.

'Webling, Webling?' the storekeeper's tone was a trifle dubious. 'Oh, I know who you mean; it is that hired man of Foster's, only he is mostly called Shucks round here, because he doesn't appear to be over fond of work. I expect he will be along presently; he looks in for a chat most evenings, and there is sure to be a bit of a crowd later, as it is mail night.'

Having heard so much, the quiet stranger dropped into the background, only he did not

leave the store, remaining there the entire evening, seated unobtrusively in a corner. When the *Pluck* made her hurried retreat down the shrinking waters of the river, there was one passenger who was left behind, and that was the quiet stranger.

No one took much notice of him, or wondered why he was there, for every man about the place was busy at the jam, and doing his level best to help in clearing away the obstruction.

It was not until the upper jam had given way with such disconcerting suddenness, letting a flood of waters down upon the rickety old schoolhouse, that the men even remembered the children's danger. Even then it did not occur to them how serious the situation was rapidly becoming. Nicky Trent was told off to take Fraser's boat, and bring the children home. Some one remarked that it looked as if there would be a school holiday to-morrow, and then they all turned their attention to the jam again.

But by this time the fears of the women were aroused, and some of them gathered in a knot on the edge of the flood, anxiously awaiting the return of Nicky with the first boat-load of children.

It was then that the stranger left by the *Pluck* hove upon the scene. He had been wandering round since early morning, and appeared to have sustained some damage to his face, for a handkerchief showing a lurid red stain was bound across one cheek and a part of his forehead. But he said it was a matter of

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no importance, in response to Mrs. Baldwin's kindly inquiry as to his hurts.

Just then Nicky came back with his cargo of frightened, sobbing children, and Hughie Baldwin cried out in shrill terror, 'Mother, mother, teacher is going to be drowned, and all the others with her !'

'Nicky Trent, do you mean to tell me that you have left my two poor boys to drown ?' shrieked Mrs. Smith, an excitable Irishwoman, casting herself upon the unfortunate Nicky as if she would rend him limb from limb.

'They won't be drowned, not if I can help it; but I shall have to make two more journeys, and I'm afraid the schoolhouse won't hold out,' he said gruffly, stripping off his coat, and scrambling into the leaky old boat again.

Mrs. Smith began shrieking that her children were going to be drowned before her eyes, which was a stretch of imagination, as the schoolhouse was not visible from that point. But the stranger asked for another boat, saying that he could row, and would go to the rescue.

'There isn't another boat handy that I know of,' said Mrs. Baldwin anxiously. 'You see, they are mostly laid up for the winter, and would take hours to get out and caulk up.'

'But surely there must be something, some old canoe, or even a washing tub ? Quick, remember there are lives in peril out yonder !' and the stranger made an impatient movement as if he would like to shake the information out of her.

'Sure an there's Mike's dug-out, but it's

The Rescue

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heavy to drag ; still, if the gentleman would help, we might manage it,' broke in Mrs. Dooley.

' Of course I will help you. Come along; where is it ? ' and seizing Mrs. Dooley by the hand to help her along, the stranger rushed off with her, the other women panting after them. The dug-out was dragged forth, a pair of oars were produced from somewhere, and the craft was ready to start by the time that Nicky arrived in sight with his second cargo, his boat perilously low in the water, though the children were all bailing as fast as they could.

' Make haste ! ' shouted Nicky. ' There are three more young ones and Miss Scarth to be taken off, and the schoolhouse is breaking up fast. I'm afraid we've got our hands full to save them.'

No need to tell him to make haste; the stranger was forcing Mike's old dug-out through the water at a speed which showed that he had strength and judgment too. Turning the bend by the maple trees, he heard the shouts of the boys, and looking over his shoulder, he saw a part of the schoolhouse roof slide into the water, saw also the white-faced girl at the window disappear from view, and then his speed quickened still more.

He passed the boys afloat on the form, and called to them to stick tight, as they would be picked up later. Then he shouted a word of encouragement to Neal Dobson, whose form had found a lot of sawmill logs.

' N. mind me,' called back Neal, trying

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to look as if he liked it. 'Teacher is in there ; get her out if you can.'

The stranger nodded, then worked the dug-out round to the other side of the schoolhouse, where the current was strong as a mill race, and peered into the ruin.

At first he could see no sign of life, and he cried out sharply, 'Anyone there ?'

'Yes,' responded a faint voice. 'Make haste ; I can't hold on much longer.'

'I should think not !' muttered the stranger in pure amazement, for he had just caught sight of a figure hanging from the cross beam of the building ; then hunching his back to bear the force of the impact, he sent the dug-out through the window-frame.

But the window was narrow, and the dug-out was broad, and the force he had put into his endeavour caused the boat to stick fast in the framework of the window, so that in spite of all his efforts he could not dislodge it.

Shipping his oars, he kicked off his boots, and plunging into the water inside the schoolhouse, he swam under the beam from which Olive was hanging by her arms, because she had not been able to swing herself to any more easy position when the fall of the roof knocked the frail platform from under her feet.

'Let go and drop ; I will catch you,' said the unknown curtly.

Olive obeyed him without protest or delay, just because she could not hold on any longer ; and letting go her hold, she dropped like a stone into the water.

It was awful! Gasping and choking, she rose to the surface and was promptly caught by her rescuer, who, in a harsh tone, bade her lie still and not struggle; then with a few rapid strokes, he towed her across the room.

'Can you climb into the boat if I help you?' he asked, but his tone was so hurried and urgent that it sounded like a command to make haste; and forcing herself to the effort, Olive got a footing on the window-ledge, and fairly rolled into the dug-out.

A push from the inside set the clumsy craft free of the window-frame, and then the stranger also lurched into the boat, and crouched for a moment in a sodden, miserable heap, as if he had no strength or energy left.

'I am afraid you have hurt yourself?' she ventured timidly.

'It is nothing,' he said, rousing himself and trying to smile, though his face was drawn and ghastly. 'I am not very fit just now, so an extra spurt like this takes it out of me.'

Olive opened her lips to speak, but there was an urgent shout of warning from her rescuer, who forced the boat round with a jerk, just, and only just, avoiding a cluster of big logs sliding along the current, and which a moment later struck the schoolhouse with the force of a battering-ram.

An involuntary cry escaped her then, for she feared that she was going to be flung into the water again; but they had missed the danger by a hair's breadth, and now the dug-out had rounded the corner of the schoolhouse, and

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was being forced across the stretch of flood-water, to where a group of women were clustered on the bank, heedless of tempest wind and driving rain.

Nicky Trent had picked up the three boys, and had got them safely landed by the time the stranger got in with poor drenched Olive in the dug-out. She tried to utter some words of thanks for his kindness in coming to her assistance, but her lips trembled so much, and she shivered so badly, that her words were not very clear.

Then the waiting, excitable women fell upon her, with exclamations of admiration for her heroism, and pity for her drenched condition, hurrying her away in their kindness, and leaving her no time to say anything more which might have bettered her first attempt.

'It will not matter, I can say thank you to-morrow,' she told herself, when Mrs. Baldwin had put her to bed, rolled up in blankets, a hot water bottle for her feet, and a posset of herbs, hot, strong and nasty, to drink.

But when morning came, she was too ill to lift her head from her pillow, and it was three days before she was able to creep out of her bedroom, and sit by the stove in Mrs. Baldwin's stuffy little sitting-room.

Quite a string of visitors came in to see her then; the mothers of the children whom she had cared for on that dreadful morning in the flooded schoolhouse all came in one after another, each with a heartfelt word of gratitude, which nearly broke down her self-control,

because she was so weak and shaken still. But from none of these did she gain even a hint of the fresh disaster in store for her, so that the news when it came had all the force of a shock, because of its unexpectedness.

The day was wearing on towards evening, when George Foster, a school manager, came in and asked for five minutes' quiet talk with her.

Olive sat erect then, a chill foreboding of evil creeping over her. She knew that Mr. Foster was a keen man of business; he was also noted for cutting down expenses, which was another term for his method of getting the maximum of work for the minimum of pay from everyone he employed.

This afternoon he was smiling and urbane, complimenting Olive on her bravery, praising her discipline, and saying so many fussily polite things, that she became acutely nervous; and then he came to the point with quite brutal directness.

'We had a managers' meeting at Mr. Trent's house last night, to discuss the rebuilding of the school, and we came to the conclusion that it would not be possible to erect the new building before the fall,' he said, with a certain air of pomposity, which was put on to cloak his dislike of the task set for him.

'But where can the children be taught?' asked Olive, unsuspecting still. 'Of course we might do with Mr. Trent's big room for a week or two while the weather is so bad, and the out-of-town children are kept away; but it

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would be impossible to teach thirty children in that tiny place, and very unhealthy too.'

'Exactly. That is my own opinion, shared, I might say, by my fellow-managers; and so we have decided to give the children a holiday from now until October.'

'But——?' began Olive, then stopped suddenly, realizing before it was spoken how utterly futile any protest would be.

'Oh, we are not going to admit any buts,' he said with a laugh, which sounded forced, as he rose to go, thankful to have got his unpleasant errand over so quickly. 'The Board of Education may make a fuss if they happen to think about it, but they are always slow in their methods, and by the time that they are ready to interfere, the summer will be over, and we shall be able to start rebuilding. We shall pay your salary to the end of April, and start paying you again when the new building is ready. Of course if you have the offer of a better post meanwhile, we should not stand in your light, although we should lose your services with regret. But if nothing else turns up, we shall hope to see you at your post when the new building is finished.'

Olive bowed; speak she could not. Mr. Foster got himself out of the room with as much haste as he deemed compatible with politeness. He put his head in at the kitchen door as he passed, and told Mrs. Baldwin, who was cooking supper, that in his opinion the schoolmistress looked as if it would be some time before she was fit for much hard work, so

it was just as well that the children were going to have a good long holiday.

'The great unfeeling brute!' muttered Mrs. Baldwin, shaking a floury fist at the retreating figure of George Foster. And then with rare delicacy she kept away from the sitting-room until it was time for supper, realizing that Olive would rather bear the first bitterness of the bad news alone.

After the first pang of knowing herself out of employment for months to come, Olive simply could not keep back the rush of joyfulness that came over her at the thought that now she must go home, and that as speedily as possible.

So when Mrs. Baldwin came in to lay supper, instead of the weeping, downcast maiden she had feared to see, she found Olive with shining eyes, a faint pink flush in her cheeks, and a flutter of pleasurable excitement all about her.

'Do you know, Mrs. Baldwin, that the school is not to be rebuilt until the autumn, and that I am to go home at once?'

'I ought to know it pretty well by this time,' responded the good woman tartly, for judging by Olive's happy looks, the bad news had proved good news, so her sympathy had been wasted, and being of an economical turn of mind, she hated to waste anything. 'Hughie has done nothing but cry ever since he heard that there was not going to be any more school till the fall.'

'I expect that I shall cry too by next week, or the week after,' said Olive, twisting her face

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into a rueful pucker, 'because, you see, no work means no pay, and I can't imagine how I shall get through this summer without a salary. But I have been so shockingly homesick, that this chance of going home is just — just — oh, I can't describe how good it is !'

'Poor child, poor child !' murmured Mrs. Baldwin, whose heart was as large as her person. 'But you have never moped, I will say that.'

'Moping is no good,' returned Olive, shaking her head with a decided air. Then she asked, 'By the way, who was it that came to my rescue the other day in the flood ? I did not seem to know him at all, although his face was so bandaged that I could not see very much of it; but his voice was not familiar, and he spoke like a cultured man.'

'No one seems to know anything about him,' replied Mrs. Baldwin, 'except that he came up river on the *Pluck*, and was left behind. He wandered round all next morning as if he was looking for something, or somebody. But after he had got you out of that awful school-house, he was just mad to be off overland to Port Simpson, and offered to pay pretty well any price for a sledge, dogs, and a guide. There were no dogs to be had, so Mike Dooley undertook to guide him across the hills, and they are going to do the journey on snowshoes where it is possible; but with weather like this, they are more likely to have to wade, I should say.'

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'Do you mean that he has gone?' asked Olive rather blankly, for surely no one ever received less gratitude for a kind action than this stranger had had from her, although he had saved her life by risking his own.

'They started next morning at dawn, and ought to be at Port Simpson by this time, if they are going to get there at all,' said Mrs. Baldwin.

'I am sorry that I did not say thank you decently, but I was so wet and cold, and now it is too late,' Olive remarked, in a regretful tone; then she burst out with a question which had been bothering her more or less ever since she had recovered sufficiently to think about anything. 'Do you know what became of my school desk? I mean has it been found?'

'I don't think that anyone has ventured so far, but I will ask my husband, he will be sure to know,' Mrs. Baldwin answered. She was stepping to and fro now between kitchen and sitting-room, bringing in the supper dishes, giving a careful eye to the cooking not yet completed, and administering consolation to poor doleful Hughie between whiles.

'Perhaps the water will be down enough by to-morrow for me to get into the ruins, and hunt for the desk. There is a letter in it which is rather important; I ought not to have put it there, but of course I did not dream of what was going to happen,' Olive said with a troubled air, for she was thinking how very bad it might be for her father's plans, if anyone of an unscrupulous character were to

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get hold of the letter, and the map which accompanied it.

'It won't be fit for you, that is certain,' replied Mrs. Baldwin, with prompt decision; then she asked, 'What sort of a desk is it, one of those big fixture things ?'

'No, it is a small one standing on a table,' Olive answered; and then two or three people boarding with Mrs. Baldwin streamed in for supper, and nothing more was said about the desk or the letter which it contained.

It was nearly noon next day when Mrs. Baldwin's husband, smeared with mud nearly to his middle, returned in triumph from the wrecked schoolhouse, bearing the desk in his arms.

'I've got it, Miss Scarth, but it isn't fit for you to touch. Come outside, will you, and I'll get it open for you,' he said, sending his voice through the window in a cheerful shout.

Olive hurried outside, and exclaimed in dismay at the slime-encrusted desk.

'Looks pretty sad, doesn't it ?' he remarked, as he set it down on the bench outside the door. 'The schoolhouse is about the completest ruin I ever saw, and I guess that a lot of the bairns must have been drowned if it had not been for your pluck. We worked hard enough at breaking down that jam, and we did it at the peril of our lives too, for when it gave way seven of us were shot into the water; but we little guessed what was happening at the school.'

'Why, the desk is locked !' cried Olive in

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surprise, as Ned Baldwin tried to lift the mud-encrusted lid and failed.

' Didn't you keep it locked ? ' he asked quickly.

' Never, when I was in school,' she answered ; ' because, you see, I was there all the time, so that it did not matter, and it was such a bother to keep locking and unlocking it.'

' Where did you keep the key ? ' he asked, trying the lid of the desk once more.

' Always in the lock, because I could not pull it out only when the lock was shot. The key was on a bunch, quite a big bunch of other keys ; perhaps you dropped it coming along,' she suggested rather anxiously, for on that bunch were the keys of her trunk, the little dressing-case which had been her mother's, and her own private writing-case.

' No, I am certain that I did not,' he replied. ' There were no keys on the table either, only a pile of sodden copy-books. But it won't be much trouble to get this open, I guess.'

He slid a powerful clasp-knife under the edge of the lid as he spoke, and with a jerk prised the lid open.

But when the desk was opened, the letter was not there !

With trembling fingers, Olive turned the sodden contents over and over again, but all to no purpose ; the letter had vanished, and with it, the map which her father had sent her.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

The Home-Coming

Two hundred miles further north, on the high exposed lands beyond the valley of the Stikine, winter showed little sign of relaxing its hold, even though it was the second week in April.

A dazzling sun shone in a sky of cloudless blue, and the crisp air had a lightsome quality, which might make even a melancholy person feel cheerful, while the spirits of the gay at heart became positively riotous under its influence.

The young Scarths had made themselves a toboggan slide, which was something after the pattern of a double switchback, the lumps of earth upheaved by those human moles, the copper miners, lending themselves most beautifully to the purpose.

It was late afternoon; Bluey and Benny were home from school, and ripe for fun; Dora and Gretchen had been beguiled from the sewing which they detested, and the sport was in full swing.

A very good-looking family were the Scarths, and Dora, the second daughter, was at seventeen already being spoken of as the Star of

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the Stikine, although people who knew them declared that Olive had the more beautiful face because of the soul behind it. But Olive had not been at home since her people came to live at Orsay, and so the fairness of her face was not brought into comparison with her next sister's acknowledged charm.

The toboggan sledge was a clumsy, home-made affair, with a vile habit of tipping the unwary into the snow-drifts; but the Scarths were well acquainted with its little ways, and too expert at the business to be very often upset. They were having glorious fun just now; Dora crouched in front guiding the toboggan; Bluey and Benny knelt behind her, clasping each other by the arm to avoid being jerked off, and Gretchen hung on in some mysterious manner behind.

They laughed, they sang, they shouted, and once, but only once, they all went headlong into a snow-drift, from which they emerged with shrieks of merriment, and much good-natured abuse of Gretchen, whose extravagant antics were the cause of the catastrophe; and then they drew the heavy sledge up the hill again for a fresh start.

'If we are rich next winter, we will have a new toboggan. I should like a blue one with steel runners,' said Benny, who had been trying to steal a ride uphill, but had been promptly dislodged by Dora.

'If we are rich next winter, we shall go back to England, my dear boy, and darling smoky old London won't give us much tobogganing

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I am afraid,' said Dora, pretending to sigh, but laughing all the while.

'Never mind, Benny, you can have a little motor-car, and I will have a wax doll as big as a real baby,' gurgled Bluey, whose instincts were all maternal.

'And I will go to a boarding school in preparation for Girton. Just fancy how lovely it will be when I am "a sweet girl graduate,"' laughed Gretchen, giving the sledge an extra pull to get it up the last bit of the hill, which was the stiffest of all.

'There is Moolie wanting to be milked,' exclaimed Dora, as the plaintive lowing of a cow sounded from over the hill. 'Well, she can wait until I have been down just once more. Oh, how I do loathe milking !'

'Why is not father going to milk ?' asked Gretchen, who hated milking too, and was moreover afraid of cows.

'He has gone down to the Point, to meet the mail ; he is so anxious to get a letter from Olive ; he expected one last week, only it did not come. I am afraid that he will be in a fine state this evening if he is disappointed again ; it is so hard for him, poor darling !' sighed Dora, sitting on the sledge to fasten up her hair, which had all come tumbling down.

'Ezra Pratt says that our cow would give more milk, if she were milked regularly at the same time every day,' announced Bluey.

'I daresay she would. Punctuality seems to be the foundation of all the virtues, only the trouble is that it is so difficult of attain-

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ment,' Dora answered lazily; then she called out, 'Come along, Gretchen; let us have a really delightful rush down for the last. Oh, I should love to keep on gliding, sliding, and dashing down for hours, and hours, and hours.'

'You would be so tired that you would feel as if your legs and arms were all going to drop off,' said Benny.

'Not a bit of it,' laughed Dora. 'It is only work that makes me tired. Now then, off we go; hold tight!'

It was a necessary caution, for the heavily laden sledge, gathering impetus from its own weight, fairly flew down the hill like a shot from a catapult, glided up the rise, rocked in a tipsy, disconcerting fashion on the top, then plunged down the next slope at a breathless rate of speed.

'Oh, oh, oh! It was the best that we have had, would that we might have another; but Moolie will have tears in her eyes if we keep her waiting any longer,' said Dora, standing up and stretching her arms above her head.

'Here comes father!' shouted Benny, as a rather bowed figure came into view on the trail, which led upward from the Point. He was carrying a bag or bundle, and had a companion who was similarly laden.

'There is a lady with him,' announced Bluey, in an awestruck whisper, for ladies were a very scarce commodity at Orsay in the winter, although of men of almost every variety and nationality there never seemed any lack.

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Gretchen, who was short-sighted, fairly gurgled with delight. 'Bluey, you are too comic; fancy calling Mrs. Pratt a lady!'

'It isn't Mrs. Pratt, Gretchen, and Bluey is quite right; it is a lady, a real one; you can see it by the way she holds her shoulders and puts her feet down,' said Dora, adding in a dismayed undertone, 'Oh, I wonder who it can be? And I look so shockingly rough and untidy.'

'There is nothing special for supper either, and mother was lying down reading when I came out,' said Gretchen uneasily; then racked her brains to think of some appetizing and decorative supper-dish, which might be evolved out of nothing without much trouble or expense.

'It looks like Olive,' said Bluey slowly. She was the hawk-eyed one of the family, and had been steadily staring at her father and his companion ever since they had come into sight, round the bend in the trail.

'It is Olive, it is!' shrieked Dora, in a perfect ecstasy of joy; and away she rushed, to be followed, and speedily out-stripped, by Gretchen, whose legs were longer and lankier; while Bluey and Benny came tearing along in the rear, the whole four casting themselves upon Olive, hugging her until she was fain to cry out for mercy.

'I shall be smothered, I am sure I shall, and then you will be sorry!' she gasped, laughing, and breathless, yet thinking all the while how sweet it was to be welcomed like

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this after her long months of loneliness and home-sickness. 'Did you wonder who it was with father? Which knew me first?' she asked, as a fresh onslaught began.

'It was Bluey; she can see everything, from the mountains in the moon to the bunch of feathers which the latest discoverer tied on the top of the North Pole. But I am as blind as a bat or a mole, and I am thinking of taking to spectacles soon,' said Gretchen, in a mock-melancholy tone, with the whimsical exaggeration to which she was prone.

'Then, Bluey, I will race you from here to home, for I am just yearning to see mother,' said Olive; and dropping her bag on the snow, away she went, with all three girls streaming after her.

Such a poor little house it was, so mean and ugly to look at, that a shiver went over Olive, as she thought of all it must mean to her beauty-loving father and mother.

Bluey won the race by half a length, so she said, which meant that she caught her foot in a bit of old harness which was lying in front of the house, and so fell headlong with great force, her head just touching the door.

But the occasion was too festive for tears, even though she had bumped her forehead, grazed her knee, and knocked the funny bone of her arm. Picking herself up almost, but not quite, before she was down, she burst open the door and then dashed into the house.

A worn-looking woman in a shabby frock glanced up from the book she was reading,

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and said in a gently protesting fashion, 'My dears, what a riot !'

'Mother, mother !' cried Olive, fairly tumbling over Bluey, to reach her mother's arms, while the other girls cried out in varying keys, 'Mother, mother, can't you see that it is Olive ?'

'Of course I can,' said Mrs. Scarth, as she clasped her firstborn in her arms, adding with gentle sarcasm, 'I am not blind, nor even deaf—yet !'

'Why didn't you write last week, and say that you were coming ? We should have had all the joy of expecting you then; now we feel defrauded, and there is nothing nice for supper either,' said Dora, who was again wrestling with her rebellious hair.

'I did not know that I was coming when last week's mail started, and I don't in the least mind what there is for supper. But what a noise that poor cow is making ; is it hungry, do you expect ?' asked Olive, on whose sympathetic heart Moolie's plaintive lowing was already making an impression.

'It is only waiting to be milked, and I hate milking ; perhaps father will do it when he comes home,' Dora answered in an easy tone, as she dropped into the nearest chair, and began to look rather tired.

'Father is going down to the Point with a hand-truck, to bring up my trunk. But I can milk, and I shall love to do it ; show me where to find a pail, a stool, and an apron,' said Olive ; and Gretchen flew to get what was

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wanted, but Dora leaned back in the chair, declaring herself too tired to stir.

'Done up, are you, dear?' asked her mother, in kindly concern. 'You should not work too hard in this severe weather. I can't think what would happen if one of you fell ill on my hands in this awful place.'

Dora burst into a merry laugh. 'I'm not that sort of over-done, mother darling; my trouble is that I hate work of any sort or kind, and if life could be all one long playtime, I should be one of the most energetic people in existence; but the mere thought of work takes it out of me, and makes me feel as limp as a rag.'

'Poor child! It is rather horrid to have to work when you want to play,' said Mrs. Scarth compassionately. 'But if your father finds all that gold, why, you need never do another hand's turn as long as you live; so let the prospect comfort you. I am sure that I could not bear the thought of your dear father going off, and being away in the wilderness for days and weeks, perhaps even months alone, if it were not for the thought of what riches will mean to you young ones.'

'Perhaps father won't be very long away the first time; then when he has got his claim staked out—no, it is pegged out, isn't it, what it is called?'

'Yes, I think so,' said Mrs. Scarth, with a nod.

'Well, when he gets his claim pegged out,' went on Dora with a deep sigh of satisfaction, 'one or two of us might go with him, and he'

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get the gold. He would not be so lonely if we were with him, you know.'

'It would be frightfully hard work for you, and I cannot bear to think of any of you being dragged to pieces with toil.' Mrs. Scarth's tone was pathetic with regret; hardship for herself did not count, but it was terrible to her to even think of wearing drudgery for her children.

'We should have to call it play, then perhaps it would not seem so bad,' said Dora, wagging her head. 'Besides, there would be the compensation to think of. Every time I heaved up a chunk of gold as big as an apple-dumpling with my spade, I should say to myself, there goes a winter in Rome, or a spring in Venice, or a yachting tour in the Adriatic; then I should not mind if my back ached, and my hands were blistered.'

'I should think not indeed!' laughed her mother, 'but gold does not come up in chunks like apple-dumplings; you must be thinking of Kauri-gum, the stuff which is dug in New Zealand. Gold is found in bits like peas I think, or even smaller, and it has to be rocked about in a sort of cradle to wash out the dirt.'

'Frightfully messy work it sounds, worse than cleaning a floor, or peeling potatoes; what a lot of dirty work there is in the world!' and Dora yawned in a sort of bored disgust, then fell into an animated discussion with her mother as to the superior charm of apricot satin over wistaria blue velvet, for drawing-room furni-

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ture, in the house they would have when the riches were an accomplished fact.

Meanwhile in the barn, Olive was sitting on a rather shaky flour-barrel, with her head tucked into Moolie's side, making the milk flow in tinkling streams into the pail, while she told Gretchen and Eluey the story of her thrilling adventure in the flood. Benny had gone down to the Point with his father, to help drag the hand-sledge up the hill with Olive's trunk. He had rather objected to going, until Olive remarked on the high estimation she had for helpful boys; then he went off without another murmur.

'How beautifully you milk, it flows so easily, and you don't seem in the least afraid of Moolie,' said Gretchen, with a little sigh of admiration. 'I am always expecting that she will kick me over, or turn round and poke at me with those awful horns of hers.'

'Ezra Pratt says that our cow would give more milk if she were milked more regularly,' announced Bluey, repeating the information for Olive's benefit.

'Ezra Pratt is very fond of meddling in the business of other people,' said Gretchen rather tartly. 'Suppose you go and feed the fowls, Bluey, or they will be forgotten, and will go to roost without a supper, as they did two nights ago.'

'Why didn't you send the money for father last week? He was dreadfully low-spirited about it.' Gretchen dropped her voice to a confidential undertone when Bluey had gone,

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and there was a hint of reproach in it which made Olive colour painfully.

'I could not help it; the mail was late in coming up river, and then the boat went out again in the night, so there was no time. Even now I cannot let him have as much as he wanted, because I have had my journey to pay for, and now I have only thirty-five dollars left,' she answered, almost in apology, for it seemed so dreadful to fail her father in his need.

'It seems a tremendous lot of money to anyone who has none at all, and I have not even a cent piece,' said Gretchen, laughing; then she burst out eagerly, 'Do you think, Olive, that father will get that gold, piles and piles of it?'

'I don't know,' replied Olive, shaking her head in a dubious fashion; 'but it makes me feel very bad, to think of his going off alone into an unknown country, and in such bitter weather too.'

'It won't be bitter long,' Gretchen said. 'And he could not reach the place if the morasses were not frozen over you know; that is why he is in such a hurry to start.'

'Oh, Gretchen, I am so worried that I don't know what to do,' Olive said impulsively, as she rose from her seat when the milking was over. 'The letter which father sent to me is lost, or stolen, and the map that he sent with it!'

'How dreadful! And you have got to tell father! How I pity you, poor dear old Olive!'

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Gretchen's face fairly glowed with sympathy, and Olive was comforted in spite of herself.

'I suppose he has another map?' she said, her tone a little doubtful, as if she feared he had not.

Gretchen shook her head. 'I don't believe that he has a copy on paper, but he has one in his head right enough, for I am quite sure that he knew it off by heart, before he sent it to you. But just think how awful it would be for him, and for all of us, if that letter and map have been found by anyone who would make use of them, and get to the place before father!'

'I suppose I ought to have told him directly, but I simply could not spoil that first half-hour, for I have wanted to see you all so badly.' Olive caught her breath in a sob, for now that she was really at home, it seemed almost impossible that she could have borne her banishment so long.

'It is very hard for you, but I am sure he ought to be told quickly,' said Gretchen. 'Suppose you go and meet him, Olive, whilst I take the milk indoors. You can say that you have come to help drag the sledge up the hill, and that will give you a chance to get it over, when you are almost alone with him.'

'So I will.' Olive huddled her milky hands into her warm gloves without washing, knowing that the milk was the best possible thing for her skin in that ~~sty~~ air. Then she set out along the trail to the Point, and had covered nearly half a mile before she met her father and Benny with the sledge.

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'Have you come to pull? Then can I have a ride?' asked Benny, who never walked when riding was possible in any shape or form.

'No, no, that would not be fair for father or for me,' laughed Olive. 'But you can run on ahead, and help the girls get supper, then afterwards we will all unpack together.'

Benny started at a run; he had had quite enough of pulling, and getting supper was suggestive of all sorts of pleasant possibilities.

'My dear, you should not be doing this; you must be so tired after your journey,' said Jacob Scarth, his refined speech in marked contrast to his unkempt appearance and shabby garments, which hung upon his loose-jointed figure as they might have done upon a scarecrow.

'I came to help, because I wanted to talk to you alone,' she replied, then jumped at once into her story. 'Father, I have had the misfortune to lose your letter, and I am afraid that it has been stolen.'

He fairly groaned. Then he asked in a tone which he could not keep from trembling: 'But the map, you have surely not lost that?'

Olive shivered, and shook her head, then said hurriedly, 'I mean that it is missing with the letter; but it was not my fault, dear father, except that I ought not to have taken it to school in my pocket; then I should not have put it in my desk. I forgot all about it when the flood came, because I was so afraid that the children would be drowned.'

'No, it was not your fault, only your mis-

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fortune, I can see that,' he said kindly, when she had told him all the happenings of that eventful day. Whatever mistakes in life Jacob Scarth had made, and they were many, he had never misjudged his children or been harsh in his treatment of them.

'Have you a copy of the map?' asked Olive.

'No, but I can easily make one this evening; I have it all here,' and he tapped his forehead with a melancholy smile. 'What troubles me is lest the thief who stole the letter should act upon it, and that I should find someone there before me when I reach my goal. However, I am all ready to start, and if I get off at dawn, I may still be first in the field.'

'At dawn to-morrow?' cried Olive, in dismay at the thought of parting from him so soon after the meeting.

'The sooner the better,' he said firmly, then went on with a certain hesitation in his tone: 'Ezra Pratt let me fit out on credit. I told him that I was expecting to get the money from you, so you will see him, and settle up for me, won't you, dear? There will not be time for me to go down to-night, as I ought to get to bed early.'

'I will do it, father,' she answered cheerfully, and never guessed how heavy was the burden she had taken, or the sacrifice of self which it would involve. But it meant a great deal to her that her father should not be angry with her, and presently she turned to him with a happy smile, though there were tears in her eyes. 'Daddy darling, thank you so much for not

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being cross with me. I feel as if I deserve to be scolded, yet I don't know that I could have borne it; I think that it would have broken my heart.'

'And mine too!' he exclaimed, and there was a thrill of tenderness in his tone which made her heart beat faster. 'If evil comes of the loss, we must just bear it as best we can. But we will not add to the evil by any heart-bitterness, eh, Olive?'

But she could only nod her head in reply, because her heart was too full for speech.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

Packing for the Trail

THERE was little sleep for anyone that night, except Mr. Scarth, who went to bed at sun-down, and the two children, who slipped into slumber, because they could keep awake no longer.

When Jacob Scarth said that he was ready for starting, he only meant that he had got his sledge ready. This was really a clever contrivance, being a birchbark canoe fixed on sledge runners, and so available for the double purpose of land or water travel. The stores, consisting of bacon and flour, tea, sugar, cooking utensils and an up-to-date gold-washing apparatus, were packed in the canoe and covered with canvas, which, elevated on two supports of light weight, provided a sleeping-tent for the traveller.

It struck Olive, who knew but little of outfitting for the trail, that the food supply seemed rather inadequate, while a good many things were taken which might have been left behind. These were a camera, a microscope, some books of reference, and blank page note-books for recording impressions; but to her astonishment there was no clothing at all, not even a change of raiment, nor socks, nor shoes.

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'Mother, do you know that father has packed no clothes for his journey?' asked Olive, coming in from the shed where the sledge was waiting in readiness for the start.

'Olive, are you sure?' cried Mrs. Scarth, standing up with alarm in her face.

'Quite sure. I have turned over every bundle. I might even have shot myself with his gun, if I had not guessed that it was loaded, and treated it accordingly. But there was nothing to wear.'

'What a man!' exclaimed Mrs. Scarth, with hands uplifted in dismay. 'Olive, what shall we do?'

'We must pack a bundle of things and stow them in the sledge; but I do not think that he will be able to draw so much; it is not as if he had dogs,' she answered.

'I wanted him to have dogs, but he said that he should have to carry food for them, and so it would not pay, because he would get no real advantage in the end. He reckoned that if the Indians could pack a hundred pounds weight over a rough trail on their backs or their heads, he ought to manage to drag a sledge that weighs two hundred pounds over smooth snow for forty or fifty miles, and of course it will be easier coming back, because he will leave his tools and that sort of thing behind him on his claim.'

'But he cannot be sure that the snow will be smooth, and there will be hills. Mother, I am sure that the weight of that sledge ought

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to be reduced by at least fifty pounds; can't we do it for him now?

'My dear Olive, your father must have his little comforts,' said Mrs. Scarth reproachfully.

'It is not the comforts that I would reduce in the least, but there are heaps of unnecessary things among his baggage; do come out and see for yourself, mother dear,' pleaded Olive; and yielding at length, Mrs. Scarth threw a shawl round her and stepped out into the frosty night, following Olive across to the shed where the sledge was stored.

The place was buried so deep in snow, that it looked like a miniature mountain with a door in it. Dora and Gretchen were hard at work, doing something to the pair of snow-shoes leaning against the wall, and the shed was fearfully stuffy and inodorous from the heat and smell of an oil stove.

'Mother, these snow-shoes would have collapsed at the end of the first five miles; they want new straps, and fresh lacing thongs, if that is what this trellis-work sort of stuff is called,' said Dora, as her mother came to see what she was doing.

'Can you put it right, dear, or what shall we do?' asked Mrs. Scarth, with a worried air.

'We are patching them up with some straps that we have cut from Olive's luggage,' Dora answered, looking as bright and eager as when she was tobogganing, just because the business in hand happened to be something fresh and out of the common.

'Have you got a list of the things father is

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taking ?' Olive asked, as she and her mother unloaded the sledge, in order that they might go through the packages more quickly.

' Yes, I think so. Now let me see, where did we put the list, Gretchen darling ? For it was you who helped me the other day when we were so busy getting the things together.'

' I think we put it in the tea-pot, because we said that father would be sure to find it there,' replied Gretchen, who was sucking her thumb in a rather doleful fashion because by accident she had hammered it instead of the nail at which she had aimed the blow.

" Ah, yea, the teapot it was; but oh, I wonder, where did we put the teapot ?' and Mrs. Scarth hunted round in a vague, helpless sort of way, until Olive unearthed the teapot from underneath the microscope case; and opening the lid, discovered that some loose cartridges had been packed inside as well as the list.

' We put the cartridges in the teapot, so that he should have a few handy; but it was father himself who packed the teapot in that queer place,' said Gretchen, who came to look on, still comforting her wounded thumb.

' Poor darling, what a long time he would have taken to hunt for that teapot when he went to make his supper !' laughed Dora, who also came to look on; and then she stayed to read the list, while the other three found the articles, and repacked them in a more convenient and less weighty form.

It was a long task; midnight came and went, the small hours crept by, the stars glinted down

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in their frosty brilliance, but the workers in the shed were too busy to spare any time for even thinking of the night outside, in their earnest and loving preparation for the day which was to come.

The missing clothing was down on the list, and a long and anxious search revealed the bundle at last, put up on a high shelf over the door, in company with some empty cases and oddments of various kinds which had evidently been rejected on account of their weight.

Everything was packed at last, and the entire weight stood at a hundred and seventy pounds, the reduction having been mainly effected by leaving out books and boxes.

'That will have to do, I suppose,' said Olive. 'But what a weight it will be to pull over so many miles of snowy waste, where there is not even a trail! How far did the man say that it was, mother?'

'He was too ill to say much about it, but your father judged it to be about sixty or seventy miles across the morasses. It is quite unexplored country in that direction, and the poor fellow said that in all his wanderings he never once met an Indian. He had seen no human being at all for four long months until your father found him on the Dease Water trail,' said Mrs. Scarth.

'Did he die then and there? How awful!' Olive shivered and turned pale at the mention of this tragedy of the snows, and the terrible grip of the wilderness cold.

'No, he lived until four o'clock the next

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morning. Your father and I sat up with him, and tried our very utmost to keep him alive; but I think that he was just worn out,' said Mrs. Scarth, putting up her hand to wipe away a tear of pity, because of the fate of this unknown man.

' Didn't he tell you his name, or anything? Had he no friends anywhere in the world?' asked Olive, feeling almost inclined to cry also, because of the sadness of such an ending.

' We asked him,' replied her mother, ' but he said that he had been no credit to his name, and so preferred to forget it. He told us there was no one to mourn for him, and that if he slipped out of life, it would matter to no one. Then because he had no money to pay us for being kind to him, he told us of the wonderful find of gold which he had made in the hills beyond the great morasses. He might have been a millionaire, if he could have lived a few weeks longer; but as it was, he died in absolute destitution.'

' It was bad for him, but it will be lovely for us; and just think, if father had not found him dying in the snow, we should never have heard of the gold,' said Dora, with a rapt look.

' Still, it does not seem right that we should have the sole benefit of what he found, when perhaps somewhere in the world there are people belonging to him, who have a greater claim,' Olive remarked, in a dubious tone.

' But we have not got the gold yet, have we? And it may turn out to be a mistake after all,' suggested Gretchen, with the sturdy

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common sense she sometimes displayed, which made them laugh now, though they quickly became serious again. The dawning was not far away, and they were thinking of the dear traveller who was to set forth at daybreak, with his face towards the wilderness and the perils of the unknown.

'Was there nothing about the man who died that might serve to identify him?' persisted Olive, when they had crept, shivering, back to the house, through the bitter cold of that hour before the dawn, to rouse up the fire and cook breakfast.

'There was only a small book of rough sketches done in charcoal, or the end of a burnt stick, which is about the same thing. Let me see, what did I do with it?' said Mrs Scarth, hunting through a very tumbled work-basket, and finally coming upon the thing she searched for, mixed up with undarned stockings and garments in need of repair. 'Oh, here it is, but it conveys nothing that could lead to the discovery of who he was, so far as I can see.'

Olive took the book, which was merely a few sheets of the coarsest wrapping paper, but it was filled from beginning to end with drawings, done with a burnt stick. A queer collection they were, but all of them showing great cleverness and artistic skill. Right at the end of the book was the sketch of a man's head, a strong, quiet face, with a resolute jaw, while printed underneath were the words, 'Dear old Tony.'

'Now where have I seen a chin like that?' murmured Olive, passing all her men-acquaint-

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ances in mental review before her eyes, in a vain effort to remember; and then she said to her mother, 'There is more than enough here to establish the identity of the poor dead man, if we could only come across the people who knew him. Don't you think we ought to take great care of the book, mother ?'

'Suppose you take it then, dear; it is sure to be safe with you,' said Mrs. Scarth, with a happy shifting of the responsibility on to someone else, which was a way she had.

Olive nodded, and slipped the little book into her writing case; if it were left about, Bluey and Benny might take it some day for fire-lighting, or the manufacture of paper pellets to be used as ammunition for pop-guns when peas were scarce.

Jacob Scarth awoke in jubilant spirit . he had dreamed that he had found the gold without any trouble at all, and that he was so rich he hardly knew how to spend his money fast enough.

'It is a good omen to dream like that on the eve of a journey,' he said in a moved tone, as he told them of his dream, standing by the breakfast-table. 'And oh, my dear ones, my dear ones, it is for your sakes I yearn to be rich, that you may know no lack in bed and board, that you may realize your ambitions, and see the fulfilment of every cherished fancy. For myself I do not care very much; a roof to shelter me, a crust to eat, a book to read, and all God's wonderful creations to admire, these are enough, and more than enough. But I want you all

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to have the very best and choicest of all that earth can give you, and so I shall set out with a glad heart to-day, because I am going for you all.'

His voice broke in a wavering catch; Mrs. Scarth sobbed, but the three girls rushed upon him, half-suffocating him with hugs and kisses; then Bluey and Benny came running in and cast themselves upon him also, making him fain to cry out for mercy, after which they all sat down to breakfast in quite a cheerful frame of mind.

Olive and Dora drew the sledge up the long hill above Orsay, but they had no snow-shoes, and their pace would hinder their father's journey, so they dare not go with him any farther.

'Now remember,' he said at parting, 'I may be home in two weeks, or not for two months. I may not even return until winter comes again. But come I shall, of that I feel assured, or I think this moment would break my heart!'

'Father, don't go!' burst out Olive impulsively; 'we don't mind being poor, indeed I think we like it, but we shall be miserable without you.'

'You will soon forget the misery when I come back,' he said, striving to seem light-hearted, yet by the very sternness of his speech showing how great was the effort by which he maintained his self-control. 'Meanwhile, on you two must rest the burden of the home, for you are the eldest; and as I have always

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spared your mother worry, so you must be careful that she is spared now.'

'Oh, Olive, wasn't it awful! I felt as if I should break my heart, but you were as quiet and unmoved as a stone,' sobbed Dora, when her father on snow-shoes, with the sledge gliding along behind him, was a vanishing speck in the white distance.

But Olive neither moved nor spoke, standing silently watching until her father had disappeared round the angle of a hill that was clothed from base to summit with low scrubby larches, looking black and dead against their setting of blue sky and white snow. Then she roused herself, shivered a little, and asked, 'Is that the Dease Water trail round there, the place where father found the man who was dying from want?'

'Yes,' replied Dora, as the two turned back towards home. 'Father had gone for firewood, and when he came back, he had got the man lying on the wood-sledge. When he died, father and Ezra Pratt made him a coffin out of packing-cases, then they thawed out the snow and dug him a grave. But there was no minister, so father had to read the burial service. There was not even a cemetery lot laid out, so they had to mark one out then, and arrange everything.'

'Is Orsay going to be a town?' asked Olive, in surprise; so far she had only seen the house at the Point, on the bank of the creek, where the mail sledge had dropped her and her baggage yesterday afternoon.

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'Oh, yes, it is all laid out in town lots,' Dora answered. 'Father bought ten lots on Third Avenue, next to the *Stikine Hotel*, because the land was so cheap, and he expected to make about five times as much of it by selling it again a lot at the time for building sites. But no one wants to build so far, and we planted all the lots with potatoes last year.'

'Did you get a good crop?' asked Olive, who knew but little of the real conditions of home life, because so few practical details ever found their way into the letters she received.

'I suppose so. But I was not at home when they were taken up, that was when I was working for the scholarship that I didn't get. Oh, I do hate examinations!' cried Dora, clenching her fists with quite vicious energy. 'The very sight of the examining man sends all my small stock of wits flying, and they don't come back until it is too late to do any good.'

'Poor child, it is very horrid, I know!' Olive answered, in a sympathizing tone; then she lurched a little in her walk and caught hold of Dora, to keep herself from falling.

'Why, whatever is the matter—are you ill?' asked the younger sister in consternation.

'Only tired out, I think,' Olive answered, recovering herself by an effort. 'You see, there was so much ice in the river that we had to come in sledges from Patterson's Port, so I have not been to bed for two nights, and I feel as if I could sleep right round the clock.'

'Oh, you poor dear thing! You shall be put to bed, and left there until you are rested!'

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exclaimed Dora ; then urged Olive to a brisker pace to get her home the sooner.

Mrs. Scarth had gone to bed to cry herself to sleep, because she was too low-spirited to keep awake ; and Olive crept in beside her, and being too worn out for tears, she fell asleep at once.

Bluey and Benny had gone to school. Dora and Gretchen were nodding, one on either side of the stove in the kitchen, while outside the sun poured down with the fervour of an English June.

Spring was coming with giant strides while daylight lasted, but with the falling of night the frost would bite again, and spring would stay her steps for a fairer day.

That afternoon when Bluey and Benny came rushing home from school, they brought tidings with them of the kind that shakes a new place to its centre, and makes or ruins a town in a day.

' There has been a big copper find in Jimmy Timson's lot, that is just below ours on Second Avenue. Everyone is nearly wild about it, and Ezra Pratt says that father can make ten times as much money for his land to-day as he gave for it a year ago,' shouted Bluey, rushing into the house like a whirlwind, while Benny came tearing after.

' Father always said there was copper on our land,' cried Dora, her cheeks pink with excitement. ' But, oh dear, how tiresome it is that he started before the news came ! I wonder if mother can sell the land for him ? '

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They roused Mrs. Scarth from sleep to tell her the news, but she declared that she had no power to act for her husband in that fashion, adding that if there was copper on their land, it would be a pity to part with it. To Olive, however, the tidings brought a sense of disaster; for if she had not lost her father's letter, he would not have felt compelled to start so soon, and then this chance of enrichment need not have passed them by.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

The Boom

IN just one week Orsay flashed into tremendous importance in mining circles. Men swarmed in from every quarter and land was taken up at ruinous prices, for the vein of copper was said to be the richest ever discovered. The scaffold poles of the *Stikine Hotel* began to go up, and the whole place was in a ferment.

The commotion was still rising on the morning when Olive went down to the store. This was a little house under the hill where Ezra Pratt lived, and where he sold anything and everything for which he could find a purchaser. Olive's errand was to discover how much her father was in his debt, and to pay what she could of it from the money she had in hand.

There was a curiously subdued look about her, as if she were afraid of what she was going to hear. In truth the burden of home was pressing upon her, and she was wondering how she could possibly manage to keep things going with the resources at her disposal.

Ezra Pratt had blossomed into a boarding-house keeper in these days of boom, and probably he was making money hand over hand,

as food had gone up to famine prices, and he happened to have large stocks just in.

He was a short, thick-set man, with an eye like a fish, and a very dominant manner. There was a pen stuck behind his ear, a revolver poking from his pocket, and a swagger of prosperity all about him, which somehow roused Olive's resentment, and whipped her courage up to meet him with an undaunted front.

'Good morning, Mr. Pratt; can I speak to you in private for a moment, please?' she said, as she entered the store which was crowded with loungers.

'Most happy, miss; will you please to step this way?' and Ezra swung open the door of his private apartment, which was drawing-room, kitchen, and nursery by day, and bedroom at night, for himself, his wife, and three children.

But it was clean, or at least as clean as possible, and there was something in the face of the worn little woman who was bending over the stove which aroused Olive's instant liking, causing her to stretch out a friendly hand in greeting. 'Good morning, Mrs. Pratt—no, please don't run away because I am here,' she said, as with a hurried movement the woman turned storewards.

'She must, miss; that riff-raff out there ain't to be trusted a minute, without someone to overlook them; they would about clear out the perwisions in ten minutes, if Mary wasn't there to see after 'em when I'm called away. Now what can I do for you, miss?' The store-keeper's tone changed from civil explanation

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to brusque business, and again Olive felt a thrill go through her, which was like strength for combat.

'I have come to see how much your bill is against my father,' she said quietly.

Ezra ducked his squat form into what he deemed a respectful bow. 'That is soon told, miss. A hundred dollars for out-fitting him in this prospecting business, which to my way of thinking was a little bit of a mistake, for although your pa is a clever man, and an out-and-out gentleman, he ain't cut out for the prospecting lay. Then there is the old account, which stands at one hundred and fifty dollars, total two hundred and fifty dollars, and your pa said that you would pay, miss.' Ezra's square jaw snapped on the last word, and his fishy-looking eye noted the panic in Olive's face.

'But I haven't got the money!' she gasped.

'Not with you of course; it wouldn't be wise, miss, with all that crowd tumbling over one another outside. But your pa said that you would pay. "My eldest daughter has money, Mr. Pratt; she will see you paid," were the words he used,' said Ezra solemnly, and staring harder than ever.

Olive fought a hysterical desire for laughter; she could see her father standing where she stood, and in his dreamy unpractical manner elevating her poor little teacher's salary into a competency which would be equal to every demand that could be made upon it. But tears were very near to laughter, and she choked

back a sob as she answered bravely, determined that at least there should be no more misunderstandings with regard to her position.

' My father must have failed to make you aware of the real facts of the case. I am a school-teacher at Redway Falls, and I have only my salary to depend upon. But I have thirty dollars saved, which I will bring you at once, and the rest I will pay as soon as I can earn the money. My salary at Redway Falls has stopped until the schoolhouse is rebuilt; but perhaps I can earn money in other ways this summer.'

Ezra Pratt coughed and looked uncomfortable. He was fond of his money, and did not care to have only the word of a girl as security for the payment of a debt. But there was something in the face and attitude of Olive which kept him from the utterance of all the disagreeable things he would have liked to say.

' If your pa were only right here now, he could about coin money by selling them five bottom lots of his,' he burst out in a reproachful tone.

' I know,' she answered with a shiver, for she blamed herself bitterly in the matter of that lost letter, which had been the cause of hastening her father's start, and any allusion to the awkwardness of his absence always made her wince. Then she ventured timidly, ' But the land will be as valuable when he comes back, won't it?'

' I doubt it, very much I doubt it,' said

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Ezra, shaking his head from side to side.
‘This copper craze ain’t the sort of thing to last, and copper mines have a trick of ending up unexpected. Land is booming now, and they are lucky people who have got it to sell; but once it slumps again, as slump it will, nobody needn’t look for Orsay land to fetch more than tillage price, and that isn’t high in the Stikine valley, as you know very well.’

‘How long do you think it will boom?’ she asked anxiously.

‘Can’t say. It takes a clever man to foretell the length of a copper-pocket, and I ain’t that. When do you expect your pa home, miss?’ he demanded abruptly.

‘We do not know. He said two weeks, two months, or perhaps not until next winter,’ she answered.

‘If he doesn’t turn up till then, it will be to find his chance gone with the land, and most likely he will come home poorer than he set out,’ went on Ezra in a gloomy tone. ‘But you look to have your head set on straight, miss, and I’ll take your word for it that you will see me paid.’

‘Indeed I will,’ said Olive earnestly, and the look in her eyes was an assurance in itself. ‘I will go home now and consult my mother, then perhaps we can settle what is best to do to raise the money quickly.’

‘That is as you please, miss,’ he said a little dubiously, for although he stood in the position of creditor, while she was the debtor, he was afraid of offending her by suggesting a way out

of the trouble. 'But there is plenty of scope for raising money in Orsay now.'

'What do you mean?' she asked quickly, wondering if he were going to suggest that she started digging on her own account.

'There is my wife here, just about as near killed with hard work as it is possible for anyone to be. We've thirty men sitting down to supper in the tent outside, and Mrs. Pratt has to cook all the food herself. If she could reckon on a good steady hired girl to help her for the best part of every day, she'd be willing to pay a wage that would not be long in mounting up to the level of that debt of your pa's.'

Olive flushed a distressful red right up to the roots of her hair, while all her pride rose in revolt at what she deemed the man's impertinence. 'I—I am afraid my mother would not like me to do work of that sort,' she faltered, hardly knowing what she said.

'Most likely not, miss; there's many things in life that isn't what we would have. But you look to have the right sort of pride, and whatever you decide to do in the matter, I guess you mean to see me paid,' he said, moving aside to let her pass out by way of the door into the store.

'Yes, indeed I do,' she answered; then nodding to Mrs. Pratt, by way of saying good morning, she went out through the crowd of bystanders, and turned up the hill towards home.

There was a dazed feeling about her, a sense of being crushed down by an intolerable

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weight. What was she to do ? It was her father's burden which she had to carry, and it was his debt that must be paid; two hundred and fifty dollars: what could she do ? But even that debt was not all her burden. There was the other question of how they were to live if her father's return were to be delayed. The land and the house were theirs, but they must have food and clothing. How were these to be provided, when the income was nil ?

' Oh, if I were a man, how I could work ! ' she cried to herself, standing still in the sunshine, and thrusting her hands upward as if to push away the burden that threatened to crush her with its weight. Then suddenly she burst out laughing, saying under her breath, ' What silly creatures we are to hug our poor little rags of pride and self-esteem ! People who owe money have no right to be proud. I will go home and bring mother round to my way of thinking, if I can.'

Dora came dancing out of the door to meet her. ' Why, Olive, what have you been doing ? ' she cried. ' Gretchen and I have been simply screaming with laughter, as we watched you. Was it Lady Macbeth you were doing, or Hamlet ? The way you lifted up your hands and then clasped them together was quite too funny. If father does not find that gold, you might do worse than go about the country reciting Shakespeare. I would come with you, and dress you for your parts ; it would be really jolly.'

' We can consider that later ; at present

there is more serious business to occupy our attention. Come in and let us talk to mother about it,' said Olive, slipping her arm through Dora's, and drawing her inside the kitchen, where Gretchen was kneading a batch of bread, twisting, turning, thumping, and pounding the lump of dough with great zeal and energy.

'Must we do the talking now? See how the sun is shining. I was going to walk over the hill and see how the copper is getting on. I am filled with the fear that those miners will start grubbing holes in our land if we do not look after them,' pouted Dora, who scented something disagreeable in the proposed discussion, and would avoid it if she could.

'Yes, we must do it now, for unfortunately it is not one of the things that can wait,' said Olive, with unconscious sternness. Life had suddenly become a very real and serious thing with her, and the effect of it showed in her face and manner.

Mrs. Scarth, gently swaying to and fro in a rocking-chair, was attempting the repair of Benny's knickerbockers; but as she had never been used to patching, the result of her endeavour left much to be desired.

'My dear Olive, how serious you look! Has anything gone wrong?' she asked, her thoughts flying swiftly to her absent husband.

'I'm afraid that matters are not very right,' rejoined Olive gravely; then she burst out, 'Mother, why didn't you tell me how very poor we are?'

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'Are we poor?' asked Mrs. Scarth vaguely.
'I mean, are we poorer than usual? We always seem to be at our last gasp financially, and then something turns up.'

'I am afraid that nothing will turn up this time, unless we turn it up ourselves,' Olive answered, with asperity in her tone. It was the feeling that she, and she alone, was responsible for the payment of this debt to Ezra Pratt which set her nerves on edge, and gave the sharpness to her speech.

'What is the use of putting on tragic airs and expecting us to be sympathetic, if you don't tell us what is wrong?' demanded Dora impatiently, while Gretchen took her hands out of the dough and stood resting them on the edge of the bread-pan, gazing at Olive in a startled fashion. Even Mrs. Scarth lost some of her usual placidity of manner, as she ceased rocking and let her work drop to the floor.

'We owe Ezra Pratt two hundred and fifty dollars; we have no money to pay with, except the thirty dollars I brought home with me; we have nothing to live upon through the summer, except a few bushels of potatoes, some of which will be needed for planting in a week or two, as soon as the frost is out of the ground; and what are we to do?' burst out Olive.

'My dear child, do not be so violent; you will make yourself ill,' said Mrs. Scarth reprovingly.

Olive caught her breath in a strangled gasp and sat heavily down in the nearest chair, but

Dora said in a petulant tone, 'How silly to come home scaring us in this fashion about a little bit of money like that, when any day father may come back with chunks and chunks of gold ! '

'He may, but on the other hand he may not,' said Olive, striving to speak in a matter-of-fact tone, although she was trembling with agitation. 'But if he is unfortunate, and finds no gold at all, think how dreadful it will be for him to come home, worn out with toil and disappointment, to find us hopelessly in debt; why, it would be enough to break him down completely.'

'Why anticipate evil? He is sure to find it,' said Mrs. Scarth. 'That poor man said it was there, and the dying always speak the truth, as I have heard it constantly affirmed.'

'Of course father will find it!' cried Dora, drawing a long breath of relief. 'Be careful, Olive, that you do not degenerate into a regular kill-joy; I know it is not good form to criticize one's elders, and you are a little bit older than I am, but I have noticed, since you came home, that you are anxious and careworn, disposed to take things with an awful seriousness, and altogether developing into a worry.'

'Someone must worry when there is debt, and no money to pay it; besides, we must live, and where is the money coming from to pay food bills? Father left me in charge of you all, and I must do my duty,' said Olive, with a catch in her breath.

'Why cannot we let the bills stand over for a

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little while ? ' asked Mrs. Scarth easily. ' Ezra Pratt knows that he will be paid some day ; it is not as if we were vulgar, cheating people.'

Olive slipped on her knees beside the rocking-chair and gathered her mother's hands into a loving clasp ; the time had come to plead now, and she must do it wisely for all their sakes. ' Dear mother, there is a way to slide that burden of debt from our shoulders, and to help us through until father comes home. But I cannot go deeper into debt at Ezra Pratt's, for he told me to-day that his wife is killing herself with hard work, so if she were to die, poor little woman, I should feel as if I had killed her.'

' What nonsense ! ' interposed Dora sharply. ' Why should you be responsible, because someone dies of overwork in the effort to get rich quickly ? Ezra Pratt is making money very fast now, and his wife could have help if she chose.'

' She cannot get it, poor little woman ; her husband told me this morning that there are thirty men to be cooked for every evening, and she has three little children to care for as well. Mother, I want you to let me go and cook for her until our debt is paid,' pleaded Olive.

' But you can't cook ! ' expostulated Mrs. Scarth, her voice rising almost to a scream.

' I could soon learn, and I am sure that those rough, hungry men would not be very particular, or require anything beyond my power to compass,' Olive said with a smile, although she

trembled still from the effort that her daring suggestion cost her.

' You cannot, must not, shall not do such a thing, Olive ! ' burst out Dora in a whirlwind of passion, such as none of them had ever seen her display before. ' If father gets rich, and we go back to England next winter, we shall be presented at the spring Drawing-room, and you could not possibly face our gracious Queen if you had been working as a cook-maid at a low backwoods boarding-house only a few months before ; it is unthinkable ! ' Olive laughed : Dora's expression was so hopelessly tragic ; but Mrs. Scarth was weeping in a dreary fashion and must be comforted, so she said lightly, ' The Queen is a woman, a good woman, as well as the first lady of the realm, and I am quite sure that she would say that honest work was no disgrace.'

' Oh, I should die of shame, I know I should, to be obliged to remember a thing like that at such a time ! ' cried Dora vehemently.

' Mother, mother, let me go and help Olive at Mrs. Pratt's ; it would not be so bad if two of us were there,' burst out Gretchen, who was punching the dough now with tremendous energy. ' I should just love to do it, for I don't mind housework, or looking after children ; it is cows that I am so much afraid of.'

Olive's arm slid round her mother in a closer embrace. ' Dear mother, do you hear, there are two of us ready to go and work out

that debt ; so will you please say yes, as father would say it if he were here.'

'Do you think he would say yes ?' asked Mrs. Scarth, who was always ready to bend to a stronger will than her own.

'I am sure that he would,' answered Olive. 'You know, mother, that he has never shirked any labour, however hard, that would make for our comfort, and we should be very ungrateful children if we did not do our part also.'

'I would not mind if you were boys, but it is dreadful to think of girls having to do dirty, heavy work for money,' sighed Mrs. Scarth, in a distinctly yielding tone.

'If we were boys, I am afraid that we should not be of much use to Mr. Pratt,' laughed Olive; and then she gave her mother a tremendous hug, bade Gretchen put the bread in front of the fire to rise quickly, and she herself went off down the hill, to astonish Mrs. Pratt with an offer of assistance.

But Dora cried on and on, and would not be comforted ; it was not entirely disgust at this new development that made her woe : the fear was gaining ground in her heart that the riches might not be so near as she had expected.

She wanted to be rich so badly. There seemed to her to be nothing in life worth having, if she could not have money too.

The career she had planned for herself was a whirling round of pleasure and enjoyment. That it was wholly selfish never once occurred to her ; and she bitterly resented Olive's way of looking ahead and providing for the future,

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because of the doubt which the caution implied.

'Mother, mother, it is so horrid to be poor!' she wailed.

'Yes, dear, yes,' murmured Mrs. Scarth, adding in a gentle tone, 'But it is wicked to repine, so, Dora darling, be thankful if you can.'

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

Hoping against Hope

JACOB SCARTH belonged to a good old Yorkshire family, but he was the younger son of a younger son ; and although he had been reared in an aristocratic home, with every possible social privilege, when he came to man's estate he had to face the problem of earning his own living. A private secretary's post was found for him, in which he was expected to do great things ; but somehow he failed to achieve distinction, and married an orphan girl as poor as himself, and as well bred. Then fortune smiled on him ; an old aunt of Mrs. Scarth's died intestate, and she being the next, and only kin, came in for the money.

On this they lived in much comfort, until an unrest of mind and body came upon them, and a desire to increase their modest competence to great wealth, for the sake of their children, induced them to emigrate.

Since that time they had been steadily drifting lower and lower into poverty. For a time they had lived on a fruit ranch outside Vaneouⁿ City, and it was when that venture failed that Olive took the post of teacher at Redway Falls, battling bravely with homesickness and hard work, until the disaster of the "

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flood-wrecked school brought her home to wrestle with bigger problems than any she had ever before had to face.

She was thinking of the past, as she went down the hill to Ezra Pratt's store. Her childhood had been so sheltered and secure; there had never been any vexed question of ways and means, or any shortage anywhere, until after the birth of Benny, eight years ago. The coming of a boy into that family of girls had made her father suddenly ambitious; the son must have a name and a place when he grew up, there must be money to educate and start him. Girls could get along with very little, so her father said, but boys were expensive creatures to launch in the world.

'Poor darling father, how much less full of care his life might have been, if he had not suddenly grown ambitious,' Olive murmured, with tender regret, thinking of the loneliness and hardship her father might be enduring, just because of his desire that his children should have riches and to spare.

'We must just do the best we can, and love him so much, that he will not have time or space in which to remember his disappointment, when he comes home as poor or poorer than when he set out,' she said softly; and her eyes were blurred with tears as she thought of the uncertainty of his return.

The store was momentarily clear of loungers when Olive went in the second time, and Ezra Pratt was booking industriously, his desk being the top of a sugar barrel.

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There was a flash of something like amazement in his face for a moment, and then he swept his greasy old cap from his head with an air of genuine respect, although his speech failed adequately to express his feelings on the subject. 'So you've thought it over, and come back to say you're not too proud to work, though you're a bit too proud to be in debt. You'll find Mrs. Pratt inside; you settle with her about the work, and then you and me will settle about the pay.'

Olive nodded, and passed unannounced into the inner room, to find Mrs. Pratt standing at a washtub, with one foot rocking the cradle in which lay a wailing infant, while her hands were busy with the family washing.

'I can do the washing, but I am not so sure that I could manage the baby; suppose you sit down in the rocking-chair and comfort the poor mite, while I get through with this work,' said Olive, gently hustling the astonished Mrs. Pratt into the one comfortable chair the poor room contained; and taking possession of the little woman's big working apron, she tied it on with an air of great determination, then plunged her hands boldly into the evil-smelling soap-suds.

No task could possibly have been more disagreeable. She had washed frocks and pinnafores for Bluey and Benny, and only yesterday she had helped her mother and Dora to do the family washing. But that was a different matter: it was sweet to toil for one's own dear ones; she and Dora had made endless

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jokes, as they rubbed away at the soiled linen. Now as she lifted a grimy jacket-overall of Ezra Pratt's in the water, she felt as if she must, simply must, drop it again, and run away as fast as she could go.

But there was the debt to be paid; her father had given his word that she would pay it, and she was not going to fail him if she could help it. As there was not enough money, it must be paid in the still more acceptable currency of unselfish labour; so setting herself steadily to the task, she worked on, doing her very best, and succeeding beyond her expectations.

'My dear Miss Scarth, it ain't fitting that you should do such rough work, a lady like you!' protested Mrs. Pratt, in a really shocked tone.

'I am not a lady at all now, not in the sense of being above any sort of work, however hard or rough,' laughed Olive, splashing away at the soap-suds with tremendous energy. 'I have come to help you for a time, and I hope you will like having me, for I simply must earn money, and there seems no other way. Mr. Pratt said that you wanted someone to help you with the work, and though I am not very capable, yet I daresay I soon shall be.'

During this little speech Mrs. Pratt had sat staring at Olive with dilated eyes, as if she could scarcely believe her ears; then suddenly she dropped her head on to her one free hand, bursting into a passion of weeping, to which the infant accorded a wailing accompaniment.

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Olive took her hands from the soap-suds with a gesture of dismay. It had been quite bad enough to hear the baby cry, but when the mother began too, it was altogether beyond her power of endurance.

'I am so sorry if I have said anything to hurt you, and of course I will not come to help if you don't want me.' She stood over the weeping woman, patting her with a very damp hand as she spoke, feeling miserably embarrassed and ill at ease.

Mrs. Pratt caught her breath in a sob and suddenly left off crying; she jigged the baby up and down until that ceased being vocally miserable, then she looked at Olive, her face working with profound emotion.

'You don't understand,' she said in quavering tones; 'and I pray God you may never have to know by experience how I've been feeling for days past. It has been killing me, Miss Scarth, and yet I didn't dare let go and die because of the children. I'm just worn out; there isn't a bone in me that doesn't ache, and the thought of cooking supper to-night for all that lot of men has been almost more than I could bear, for I felt I hadn't it in me to do another stroke of work.'

'Poor thing, Mr. Pratt should not expect so much from you,' burst out Olive, with the indiscretion of youth which has not learned the unwisdom of criticizing the conduct and actions of married people.

'Mr. Pratt is the kindest and best of husbands!' asserted the little woman vehemently,

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sitting straight up in her chair, while a stain of red showed in either worn cheek. 'But men don't know, and can't understand that to be the mother of little children like mine is occupation enough for any woman, without a stroke of any other kind of work whatever. Why, the very fact of having such little mites toddling about your feet, and risking their limbs and their lives every ten minutes or so, is work in itself, from the way in which it keeps a woman's nerves on the stretch. Then when all the rest is added to it, the strain is fairly killing, don't you see ?'

Olive nodded in sympathy, but she did not speak; she was bending over the wash-tub again, and she did not care to open her lips in the acrid steam arising from the hot soap-suds.

How her arms and her back ached before she came to the end of her task ! More than once she would have given up, and asked to be allowed to finish next day, but for the thought that what Mrs. Pratt could do, she could do also.

It was finished at last; then she went back up the hill to her midday meal, having promised to be back at the store early in the afternoon, in order to start on cooking for the thirty men who must be fed that evening.

Gretchen was digging a piece of ground on the sunny side of the shed, which was already thawed out enough to be workable. But she came running to meet Olive, with smiles of welcome and eager questions.

'Are you going back again to-day ? May

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I come too and help ? I have dug all this piece this morning, for I could not bear to be doing nothing, while you were so hard at work. I think we shall have to hand-dig all our ground this year for planting ; it will take a lot of time, but it will save dollars and dollars.' Gretchen nodded her head with an air of great wisdom as she spoke. She admired Olive more than anyone else in the world, and if Olive saw fit to be severely practical, and tremendously economical, why then she meant to be practical, and economical also.

' Yes, I'm going to cook supper for all that crowd ; forty there will be to-night, for Mr. Pratt said that ten men had come up creek this morning, and put their names on the slate for board. I shall be very glad indeed to have you, dear, if mother does not mind. Mrs. Pratt is too tired to do more than give orders, so there will be quite enough work to keep two of us very busy, especially as we are novices at the task.'

' What money will they give you ? ' asked Gretchen, shivering as she thought of the big debt which had to be paid.

' Ten dollars a week, and for the present I shall let it all stand to the reduction of the debt,' said Olive, with a sigh of relief at the way out of the difficulty which had been shown to her.

' But what shall we live on ? ' Gretchen asked, in a worried tone. ' We haven't got any money, have we ? '

' Mr. Pratt would not take my thirty dollars,

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as I am going to work for him; so we have that, and we can make it go a long way if we are careful,' replied Olive. 'The hens are laying nicely now, and we have the cow. It is surprising, too, what a lot of things we can do without, if only we make up our minds to it, and it will come quite easy when we remember that we are doing it for dear father's sake.'

'If father finds all that gold, there will be no need to do without anything we want,' Gretchen said gleefully; but Olive's face clouded, for to her the mere mention of the gold brought a shiver of instinctive dread.

Mrs. Scarth was lying down with a bad headache, and Dora's bright spirits had suffered eclipse under a fit of sulks, so the midday meal was not a very lively affair. Bluey and Benny never came home in the middle of the day, and so there was not even their chatter to enliven the gloom.

Olive went in to see her mother before going back to the store, and was startled to see what havoc tears and grieving had wrought upon the feeble frame.

'Dearest mother, you must not make yourself ill, or what will become of us all?' she cried anxiously, as she bent over the bed and gently stroked the tear-stained face.

'Olive, Olive, I have hoped against hope, but now I have come to the end, and there is nothing left to hope for!' Mrs. Scarth said in a weak, quavering voice.

'Do you mean that you have had news of

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father ?' asked Olive, with a sudden painful throb at her heart.

' No, no, dear. There can be no news of him until we see him. But it is the force of circumstances that is breaking me down ; to think that one of the Yorkshire Scarths should ever come to be a kitchen drudge, a common maid-of-all-work, is just appalling, and I cannot stand up under it.'

' Dear mother, it won't hurt the Yorkshire Scarths for me to cook supper for forty hungry men ; there is no disgrace in hard work. But if I sat with idle hands while my father's honour was smirched by debt, there might be cause for grieving,' Olive answered in a cheery tone.

' The debts can all be paid twice over, when your father finds the gold,' said Mrs. Scarth.

' I know that. But until it is found we have got to work. Besides, there is another reason why I should help Mrs. Pratt just now ; the poor little woman is nearly killed with hard work, and she looks upon me as a sort of angel of mercy. If it hurts you to think of me working for money, just try to forget about the ten dollars a week, which of course you will not see, and imagine that I am helping the poor thing out of charity. It is really a nice idea, and if the work should happen to be extra disagreeable, I will try and regard it from that standpoint myself.' Olive laughed, as she stooped and kissed Mrs. Scarth, and had the satisfaction of hearing her laugh returned as she left the room to hurry away to her work.

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Supper, as provided for Ezra Pratt's boarders, was not an effort of culinary skill. Two huge bowls of stirabout were the chief items of the feast, and consisted of a very little meat, with a great deal of everything else—turnips, onions, carrots, potatoes, beans and oatmeal, which had been boiled and boiled into a thick stodge, very satisfying and immensely popular with the hungry men, who attacked their supper with almost wolfish eagerness. There was also a pudding of tremendous solidity, much sweetened with molasses, which might have been warranted to satisfy the keenest of appetites in the shortest possible time.

Olive was thankful to have Gretchen for a helper, and she drew a long breath of relief when the smoking dishes were all set on the long table in the canvas erection which served as a supper-room.

There was a short breathing spell then, and she stole out of doors to get a whiff of fresh air, before the work of clearing up for the night had to be done.

She was too tired after her long day of hard and unaccustomed work to stroll very far, so she sat down on an empty bean keg and watched the beauty of the sun-setting. The crimson glory had changed to tints of palest opal, and the sombre pine trees stood out black and dreary-looking against hills which were still shrouded in snow.

Olive was just going to rise and go in then, for a chill wind was sweeping up from the



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creek, and the shawl in which she was wrapped was neither big nor thick. But suddenly some chance words, spoken inside the canvas-walled supper-room, reached her ears and held her spell-bound.

'He found it out in a letter; how he got hold of the letter I can't say, but I guess he would not be particular about that, and there was a map showing the route to be taken across the great morasses,' said the voice which had arrested her attention as she was moving away.

'And you say he has gone, started already?' asked another voice, in a tone of amazement.

'Yes, he got away as soon as he could beg, borrow, or steal an outfit; you see everything depended on his getting across the morasses before the thaw came,' replied the first voice; and in her bewilderment, Olive thought they must be talking of her father, but in a minute she was undeceived.

'I suppose he was afraid the other man would get there first;' the second speaker chuckled with amusement at the thought of such a race, and the sound made her shiver. She stood still as she had risen from the keg, her shawl clutched tightly about her throat, while she strained her ears to listen; yet never once remembered that eavesdropping was a dishonourable thing, although as a matter of fact no conversation could be regarded as very private in that crowded place.

'You've got it! That is just what he was afraid of. You see the other man was here

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on the spot, so to speak, and could start when he chose. So Shucks had only got what you might call a sporting chance. But he made the best of it, and gave out that he was off to Dawson, by way of the Portland Canal.'

Olive gave a great start, while a cry that was almost a moan broke from her lips. The stranger who had rescued her from the flooded schoolhouse had gone to Dawson, by way of the Portland Canal, so at least Mrs. Baldwin had told her. Could it be possible that this man had taken her father's letter and acted upon it?

A wild disclaimer broke out in her heart. Girl-like, she had already woven a halo of romance round that prosaic-looking stranger. He was a hero of course, for had he not saved her life by risking his own? She had put him on a pedestal, and regarded him as one of the best of men, brave, noble, and unselfish. Surely, surely it could not be he who had stolen her letter, and then rushed away to act upon it.

But her reason told her that this must be the man, for had he not gone off in a tremendous hurry from Redway Falls, after having given out that he was going to stay longer.

A horrid sick sensation gripped her. It was as if she were going to swoon, and she shook herself in angry disgust at her weakness, while she rallied her forces with an effort.

She would go into the supper-room, under pretext of seeing if anything were wanted, and she would walk straight up to those two

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men who had been talking, to demand from them the name of the man who had stolen her letter.

But they were not talking now: a sudden hush had dropped over the crowd of men at supper, followed by an outburst of angry altercation, one man shouting abuse at another man, who shouted back in the same fashion; then came the crack of revolvers, and an awful cry.

Olive fled then, almost too frightened to know what she was doing, yet turning her steps as if by instinct to the hot little kitchen where were Gretchen and Mrs. Pratt.

'Oh, my dear, what is the matter? You look as if you had seen a ghost!' cried the little woman, starting up in affright, for Olive was white of face and trembling, so that she could scarcely stand.

'They are quarrelling in the supper tent; there were shots and a cry. I—I am afraid that someone was hurt,' she faltered.

Mrs. Pratt threw up her hands with a gesture of dismay. 'It is some of the lot that came up creek this morning, I expect. Ezra said that they were a fearfully quarrelsome lot, and had been having rows already. They come from Port Essington, I think, and they seem to like loafing better than work.'

'Do you know their names?' gasped Olive, for Port Essington was not many miles from Redway Falls, and the men might easily have come from that very place.

'No, that I don't!' exclaimed Mrs. Pratt,

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and was about to add something further, when her husband put his head in at the door, saying in a disgusted tone—

'There has been a row in the supper tent, and a couple of fellows have been shot.'

'Oh, Ezra, Ezra, what will you do?' cried Mrs. Pratt, with a hysterical gasp.

'Send for the police, of course,' he answered, in a grumpy tone. 'They'll come and investigate as soon as they can get here; but it won't be of any use except to make work for them.'

'But won't the police take the men who fired into custody?' screamed Mrs. Pratt, scenting no end of worry and trouble in the necessary investigations, with perhaps considerable loss of business in consequence.

'Of course they will, if they can catch the men, but they may get away in the confusion, don't you see,' said Ezra, who seemed in no hurry to return to the scene of the tragedy. 'What is no one's business is apt to get left undone, and as I wasn't present, I can't be said to know much about it.'

Then he turned to Olive and Gretchen, who stood clinging, shivering, to each other, and advised them to go home and leave the clearing up until the next day.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

An Unshared Trouble

DORA came out of her fit of sulks next morning and was her own bright self again, greatly to the relief of everyone.

It was Olive who went about with a shadow on her face now, and there was an anxious dread at her heart which she could share with no one.

The fear was on her father's account. She was wondering what had been happening out in those wilderness reaches beyond the great morasses.

Had her father got to the place first, and pegged out his claim ? Or had the other man, the one who had stolen her letter, and acted upon it, got there first ? Why had neither of them come back before the thaw set in ?

But all the questioning in the world could bring no word out of the silence, to set her fears at rest. Nor could she speak of the trouble to her mother, since it would only disquiet and terrify Mrs. Scarth to hear that her husband had perhaps an undesirable companion to share his wilderness wanderings.

Equally Olive could not tell the girls. If Dora had heard the slightest rumour that her father's search was perhaps being shared by

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another man, she would have been in such a state of mind that immediately everyone would have known that something was wrong. Gretchen was also out of the question as a confidante, because she simply could not keep a secret, however much she tried to do so.

So there was nothing for it but that Olive must bear her burden alone. Only every day her apprehension increased, and she lived always in a state of strained expectancy.

There was no one to identify the two men who had been shot. And the irony of it was, that they were not the two who had quarrelled, but a pair of entirely inoffensive men, who were sitting at the back of the tent when their supper was finished, smoking and talking. The real aggressors slipped away in the confusion, as Ezra Pratt had hoped they would, making good their escape before the police arrived.

From the position occupied by the two men who were killed, Olive felt certain that they must be the pair whom she had heard talking about the lost letter. And the horror of having been, as it were, present when they met their fate, shook her nerves, and made her feel sick and miserable for many days to come.

Fortunately the hard and constant work left her scanty time for brooding. When night came she was so weary that she fell asleep directly her head touched the pillow, only waking when morning came to call her to her work again.

Most of the early part of each day the girls

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spent in digging and planting the ground, which but for their father's absence would long since have been sold for building lots. Then when the midday meal was over, Olive would go down to the store with Gretchen, and both of them would set to work at the task of cooking for the swarm of hungry men whom Ezra Pratt fed nightly in his canvas-walled supper-room.

'Did anyone ever know such unfortunate people as we are!' cried Dora one morning, when they were planting beans on the patch of ground behind the half-erected *Stikine Hotel*, which was a mass of scaffold poles, steel girders, and framework, but which just now had not a workman upon it.

Olive paused in her work, flung an anxious glance at her sister, and then burst out laughing.

'You don't look like an object of pity, anyhow, and pray, why are we more unfortunate than anyone else?' she asked gaily, for this morning her mood matched the weather, and it was quite impossible to be downcast or depressed while the sun was shining and the birds were singing.

Dora carefully dropped three beans at proper intervals in the furrow which Olive was hoeing, and then she stood erect to ease her aching back, while she burst into vehement speech. 'If father had waited only two days before he started, perhaps only one day, all this land would have been sold at a tremendous profit; and we should not have had to break our backs over planting beans, potatoes, squash vines,

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to say nothing of spoiling our complexions in the hot sun.'

'Yours is not spoiled, or even damaged; you look downright beautiful!' burst out Gretchen, who was hoeing a row alongside Olive's, while Dora dropped beans for both.

'Silly child! What do you know about beauty? Why, you have never in all your life seen a really beautiful person,' said Dora reprovingly, although it was plain to see that she appreciated the compliment, which had been paid with so much fervour.

'I haven't seen a dressed-out, made-up beauty, if that is what you mean,' admitted Gretchen, hoeing with such industry that she fairly panted for breath. 'But Mrs. Pratt said yesterday that Olive and you would take first prize at a beauty show.'

'Vulgar little creature! As if we should ever dream of exhibiting ourselves in such a fashion!' cried Dora wrathfully.

'All the same it is nice to be appreciated. I had no idea that Mrs. Pratt even approved my style,' said Olive, with a merry laugh at the disgust displayed by Dora.

'Oh, Mrs. Pratt thinks no end of you; but I expect she has to hide her feelings, because she is rather afraid of you, she says that you carry yourself with the air of a lady of title,' announced Gretchen solemnly, whereat Olive burst into another peal of laughter, in which she was joined by Dora.

'Fancy a lady of title drudging away night after night at making stodge puddings for

miners,' said Dora, when her laughter had abated.

'It would not hurt her if that was the thing which it was her duty to do,' Olive replied quietly, with the resolute set of her chin which always showed when Dora made fun of her work.

'But you don't seem anxious to hear why it is that we are more unfortunately situated than our neighbours,' Dora went on, after a minute of silence, in which she had laid more beans in both rows.

'Why should we be anxious? Ill news flies fast enough; no need to anticipate it,' said Olive lightly, though a throb of apprehension shot into her heart, lest Dora had heard some rumour of that other man having gone to find the gold for which her father was prospecting.

'They are saying that the copper shows signs of giving out, so Orsay won't be a boom town after all!' cried Dora, with a tragic air of despair.

'Are you sure?' asked Olive, with a dismayed start. She had been hoping and hoping that her father would be able to make a good price for their building lots, so that they might have a little capital to go on with when he came back from the quest which her instinct told her was not going to be successful.

'Quite sure. It was Mrs. Shindler who told me, and as her husband is a miner, she ought to know,' replied Dora. 'Besides, if confirmation were needed of the truth of the

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report, look at the hotel; there is not a man at work upon it this morning, not a single man, and think of the swarms that were there yesterday, and for days past!"

"I had noticed that, but I thought perhaps they had struck or something; you know they are continually trying to get more money for their work," said Olive faintly.

Dora shook her head in a gloomy fashion. "It is the contractor who has struck this time, I fancy; and oh, Olive, what shall we do, what can we do, if it is really true?"

Olive leaned on her hoe, white of face and dizzy. Her load had seemed hard enough before, because of the trouble she could not share with the others; but now this unexpected blow about the copper served for the moment to shut her back from hope.

It was the wailing note of appeal in Dora's tone which roused her to fight against her black depression. She dared not give way to despair, because all the others depended on her, and she must not fail them.

"My dear, we must just do our best, and leave it; at least we shall be as well off as we were before the copper was discovered," she said, trying to speak cheerily, and succeeding better than she knew.

"No, we shall not. Before the copper was discovered, there was always a simmering expectancy in the air, that something—gold, silver, or ore of some description—would be found to make the town boom. But now it will sink and sink to the dead level of failures,

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and we know what they are from seeing how Sinclair Moosedale went down,' said Dora, dropping more beans in the trench, and truth to tell, dropping some tears in with them.

'Perhaps father will find the gold, and then nothing else will matter,' put in Gretchen, seeing how troubled Olive was, and doing her best to relieve the strain.

But she had better have remained silent, for Dora burst out passionately, 'Oh, the gold, the gold ! That horrid, horrid gold ! I am beginning to wish that we had never heard of it. I don't know about you and Gretchen, or how it may have affected you; but I do know that it has turned me into such a callous, hard-hearted creature, that I do not seem to care what happens if only we can get rich. I did not even grieve about dear father going off into the wilderness in that lonely fashion, al'ough it must have been almost like dying to him, poor darling, to go away and leave us all like that. I only thought how nice it would be to be rich, and I even begrudged the time he spent in bidding us good-bye, because I wanted him to go quickly and find the gold !

'Dora darling, don't ! It can do no good to say things like that, and it hurts,' said Olive, laying a reproving hand on her sister's shoulder; she was shocked at the way in which Dora was laying bare the inmost feelings of her heart. But Gretchen had burst into bitter weeping, and was leaning on her hoe, a veritable picture of grieving.

'I must tell it all out, then perhaps I'll

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'feel better about it,' Dora said, going on dropping her beans in the trench, while Olive moved onward, hoeing in front of her; and so they were soon out of earshot of Gretchen, who still sobbed on in a stormy fashion, leaning upon her hoe.

'I don't think that you were so bad as you are trying to make me believe,' Olive said gently, her instinct even now fighting against that desire for self-betrayal which Dora was apt to show under stress of deep emotion.

'I was much worse,' asserted Dora, nodding her head vigorously, 'and, Olive, when you started working for the Pratts, I declare that I downright hated you!'

'But why?' asked Olive, in a tone of protest. 'People who are in debt must pay or be dishonoured.'

'Yes, yes. Of course I know that. And I hate debt as much as you do. But what made me so mad with you was, because you would not believe that the gold was going to be found. You would not even pretend to believe it!' said Dora resentfully.

'Gold-seeking is such terribly uncertain sort of work, and then I never felt that father was cut out for a successful prospector,' Olive said, half in apology for her own want of faith in the matter, which really came from the hard and fast reasoning of her own common sense.

'I know all that. But I was hoping against hope, don't you see, and it was so horrid that

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you would not let me go on hugging my illusions, as I wanted to do,' panted Dora.

'I have not tried to destroy them,' Olive reminded her gently.

'You have not tried, but you have done it all the same, although I would not admit it even to myself until this morning, when Mrs. Shindler told me about the copper,' Dora said, with a gasping sob. 'Then I knew that we were going to be all round unfortunate, and when a thing is certain, it is of no use hanging on to hope any longer.'

Olive nodded in complete understanding. In her secret heart she was not sorry Dora should have come to this point of seeing things as they really were, but she would not venture a word which might hurt by seeming reproachful.

Gretchen had left off crying by this time, and by dint of vigorous hoeing had caught up with them; but as there were no beans in her row, Dora had to go back and drop them.

'Olive, do you think father is dead?' Gretchen asked, in a frightened tone.

'No, no. Why should I think so?' asked Olive, but with a fear at her heart that made her shiver.

'Dora thinks so; I know that she does by the way she has been going on,' replied Gretchen, choking back a sob. 'And do you know, Olive, I'm sure that I have been just as wicked about father going off prospecting as she has. That is, I did not trouble about how he would feel out there all alone; I only wanted him to

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go and find the gold, then come back and tell us that we were very rich. It was for our sakes he went, but if we had loved him as we ought to have done, we would never have let him go like that !'

Something came up in Olive's throat and seemed to choke her, but she swallowed it valiantly, and when speech was possible, she said softly, 'When father comes back, sad and disappointed with not having been able to find the gold, we must just make it up to him, by loving him so much that he won't have time to brood over his trouble.'

'You really think that he will come back ?' demanded Gretchen eagerly.

Olive put her hand up to her throat with a swift gesture, because of the horrid fluttering sensation there, which almost choked her. Dora had reproached her just now for not believing in the existence of the gold, and in her father's ability to find it, even hinting that it was her want of faith which would bring the quest to a disappointing ending. At least her sisters should not have to reproach her with a similar lack of faith about her father's return, and there was the sincerest conviction in her manner when she said, 'I do indeed believe that he will come back to us safe and well. Dear, dear father ! It would be an unbearable anguish to think that harm could come to him while he is away searching for our sakes.

'If only we knew where he was, and could reach him with our love !' wailed Gretchen,

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looking as if she were on the verge of another stormy breakdown.

'Don't, dear, don't! Dora is coming,' pleaded Olive, and Gretchen wrestled bravely with her desire for tears, hoeing so fast that it looked as if she were anxious to establish a record.

Dora's mood had changed from passionate self-reproach to one of deepest despondency, and for the remainder of the morning she hardly spoke at all. The others said very little either, but they worked with a grim determination, which showed how much in earnest they were about the task to which they had set their hands.

The building lots were poor soil, not at all adapted for husbandry. The ground abounded in stones, and dipped into hollows in unexpected places. Ploughing would have been difficult, if not impossible; a spade and a hoe seemed the only implements fit for the task.

By the time noon came the sun was scorching, and all three were most thankful to trail off home for a meal and a rest.

Warm as it was out of doors, they found their mother sitting in the rocking-chair close to the stove, with a shawl wrapped about her shoulders.

'Are you cold, mother? It is so warm outside,' Olive said; and her tone was anxious, for Mrs. Scarth did not look well.

'I felt chilly, and somehow I just long for the weather to be warm,' the poor lady burst out, in a petulant fashion; 'and yet at the same

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time I want it to be cold, sharply cold, so that the morasses will freeze, enabling your father to get home again.'

'But he can get home in the summer with his canoe, you know,' Olive reminded her cheerfully. 'He is not like that other poor fellow, who had no boat. Indeed, I should think that father would prefer to come home that way, as it will mean so much less fatigue for him; and now that the waters are open, I should not be surprised any day to see him come walking in.'

'If only—only he would!' exclaimed Mrs. Scarth, with a sob. 'Sometimes I think that the longing to have him home again will nearly break my heart, and then I wonder if I shall live to see him again.'

'Oh, of course, of course you will live to see him,' said Olive, forcing a laugh, but hiding a shiver by a little shrug of her shoulders. 'It would quite break his heart to come home and find that you were not here. Cheer up, mother dearie, and after lunch Dora shall take you out in the sunshine for a little stroll: it will do you a world of good.'

'I don't want any lunch, and I do not feel like going out,' Mrs. Scarth said languidly; but they coaxed and tempted her into eating, and afterwards Dora induced her to go and look at the newly hatched chickens.

Olive went down to the store that afternoon with a good many misgivings in her heart.

It secretly worried her that the others should have suddenly become so troubled about her

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father's absence, especially as there was no more apparent cause for it than there had been in the days which had gone before. She wondered if it were instinct, or just merely a low-spirited longing for his return.

It was a good thing for her that her work was so hard on this particular day that there was simply no time for brooding, or even for thinking of anything outside the task on which she chanced to be engaged.

Mrs. Pratt was openly despairing about the hitch in the copper boom. 'It will be a dreadful set-back to Ezra,' she confided to Olive. 'You see, he had bought up land, hoping to sell it again for three times as much as he gave for it; but now he says that he would be in luck to get half as much as he gave, so you may guess how low down he is feeling.'

'Perhaps things will not be as bad as they look; there may be more copper than people think, or the scare may have been got up for speculative purposes,' suggested Olive consolingly.

'No chance of that, I'm afraid,' Mrs. Pratt answered, with a doleful shake of her head. 'The miners are all so dreadfully upset about it, and if it were a speculative scare, they'd just be laughing in their sleeves, you know. A lot of them are going away to-morrow, for they say that there is a good promise of copper at Wernside.'

'Where is Wernside?' asked Olive, for she had not heard of the place before.

'It is about thirty miles from here, on the

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Sooka River. Ezra declares that if the copper turns out rich there, he'll just pack up and follow the crowd, because there is more money to be made out of the miners than there is out of land,' Mrs. Pratt said, with a windy sigh.

'I suppose there is, and it is not such hard work either,' Olive replied, thinking of Ezra Pratt's hours and hours of lounging at the store door, and contrasting this with her own hard morning's work of hoeing bean-trenches.

'It may not be for a man, but it is for the woman.' Mrs. Pratt's voice was distinctly plaintive. 'Just see how awful my life was until you came to help. And it will be just as bad again, if we have to move on. Oh dear, oh dear, I just hate to think of it!'

'Then don't think of it. Wait until something really bad comes before you are miserable; don't spoil the good times with worries about disagreeables, which may never come,' said Olive, and tried to comfort herself with her own philosophy, because of the host of apprehensions which would assail her whenever they had the chance, in spite of her efforts to shake them off.

The store was thronged that night with loungers, who wanted to know all there was to be known about the signs of slump in Orsay's prosperity; and when the loungers leaned against the kitchen window talking loudly, Olive, who was dishing supper inside, could not help hearing what they said.

'When a vein of silver works out sudden, you may be pretty sure of finding it again

somewhere close at hand, if you only look for it keerful enough,' said a grizzled old man, who had spent most of his life in Nevada, and spoke as one who knows. ' But when it is a copper pocket what gets played out, you'd best make up your mind to go prospecting somewhere else.'

' There's exceptions,' another voice put in, with a didactic ring. ' And Orsay is going to be one of them, see if it ain't.'

A burst of laughter and a storm of jeers greeted the last utterance, and before it was over, Olive was carrying the supper dishes into the canvas-walled eating-room, and heard no more. Yet oddly enough the words kept recurring to her during the remainder of the evening's work, bringing a sense of comfort with them, and reminding her that dreary as the outlook was for her just then, disaster did not always follow hard and fast rules, and there might be happier times later on.

' But the happiness won't come from the gold, I'm afraid,' she said to Gretchen, with a laugh, as the two went slowly up the hill towards home when their work was done.

' You have never seemed to have any faith in that gold.' Gretchen's tone was reproachful, for, like Dora, she appeared to think that if only Olive had believed hard enough, the good thing must have assuredly come to pass.

' I don't think that I have,' she answered. ' You see, the poor fellow who said that he had found it was not the sort of man who makes a successful prospector, and he might so easily

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have been mistaken. By the way, I do so wonder who he was. How very beautifully he could draw! Whenever I look at that picture of Tony, I feel quite struck with its familiarity, and yet I cannot remember where I have seen it before.'

'It will come to you all in a hurry, I expect, on one of these days; such things mostly do', said Gretchen, and spoke more truly than she knew, or even guessed.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

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THE days and weeks fled on apace. It was high summer in Orsay: the bright, fevered, almost delirious period of the year that the stay-at-home Englishman can only dream about, or picture vaguely to himself. There was a perfect riot of vegetation all about the little house, which had seemed so bare when Olive came home from Redway Falls in early spring.

Spade-cultivation had proved to be a great success on the lots of building land, and there were no crops in Orsay which looked so well as those planted and tended by the Scarth girls. But that was not in reality saying very much, since mining was the great interest and industry of the little township, while agriculture took a very secondary place indeed.

Mining was in a very bad way just now, however, and every week it appeared to be getting worse. The evil rumours about copper which had started at planting time had been verified as the days went on. One by one the pockets had given out, until by the time the summer reached its height, there were only two places in the township where the yield repaid the trouble of mining.

Of course this meant disaster for Orsay. The people who had rushed to the place in the spring had drifted away again. The frame-houses, which had sprung up like mushrooms in the night, had been taken down and carried elsewhere. But the hotel still showed scaffold poles and naked girders. Not a stroke of work had been done upon it since the rumours first started, and there it stood, an ugly skeleton, which made Olive feel dreary every time she passed it on her way to the store.

She had good and sufficient cause for feeling dreary in these fervid summer days, for her father had not returned, nor had any word come from him out of the silence into which he had passed that day, when he went out of her sight round the bend in the Dease Water trail. Every morning they awoke with the hope in their hearts that he would come before night. But when night came, they had to lie down to rest with the hope put off until another day. It was hard, cruelly hard, for Mrs. Scarth and the others, but for Olive it was really harder still, because she alone knew of the reason there was to fear that her father had a rival in the field. And the state of apprehension in which she lived through those hot bright days was most fearfully hard to bear.

What made it worse for her was the feeling she had that it was her own carelessness which had led to the loss of the letter. Over and over she told herself that if she had not been so foolish as to carry the letter to school with her, it would not have been stolen, then

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this trouble need not have arisen to worry her, and endanger her father.

But there is no use in crying over spilt milk, so Olive did her best to carry her burden bravely; and although she did not always succeed in feeling or even in looking cheerful, she never openly gave way to despair, like Dora and Gretchen, who broke down regularly about once a week. When these fits of depression were on them, home was neither comfortable nor happy, and Olive was thankful to escape for awhile, even though the alternative was the hard drudgery which she had to face at the store.

But the end of her work for Mrs. Pratt was in sight, for the thing which the storekeeper's wife had dreaded was coming to pass, and Ezra Pratt was preparing, as he said, to follow the crowd, which in this case meant going with all his goods and chattels to Wernside, where copper was booming merrily, and from whence came also rumours of a silver find, although as yet this lacked confirmation from any reliable authority.

One morning in August, Olive went down to the store rather earlier than usual. Mrs. Pratt had been ill, and thus more in need of her good offices than ever; otherwise she might have found herself out of her employment before this, as there were no longer a lot of hungry miners to be fed night by night. As it was, she had been obliged to do sick-nursing, in addition to her other work. There had even been one anxious week ... July, when she

had stayed at the store night and day, because Mrs. Pratt had been too ill to be left. The little woman was much better now, however, and was so much cheered by knowing that one of her sisters was coming out from England to live with her, that she was quite reconciled to the thought of moving.

'I wonder whatever I can do to earn money when the Pratts are gone?' Olive murmured to herself, as she went down the hill, shivering as usual when she passed the framework skeleton of the hotel. She had already paid off a hundred and twenty dollars of her father's debt, but directly her salary stopped, her ability to go on paying would stop also.

It had been in her mind at first when she heard that the Pratts were going to Wernside, to offer to go with them until she was needed back at Redway Falls, so that she might keep on earning money. But her mother was ailing and needed her, while Dora and Gretchen, though willing enough to work hard, wanted someone to guide their efforts, and save them from indiscretions. Then arrived the news of the coming of Mrs. Pratt's sister, so that channel of wage-earning was effectually closed.

But the problem of ways and means was very acute. Olive knew that something she must do, only the trouble was to know what the something could be. The harvest of their fields would be very good, but it would not be sufficient to keep them in food during the winter, and besides they needed boots and clothes, with a host of other things too numer-

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ous to mention, which were not luxuries but necessities of existence.

Mrs. Pratt ran out of the store door as Olive came into sight, crying eagerly, 'Oh, Miss Scarth, would you go down to the Point and ask Ezra to come at once? He sent the mail up by Tommy Logan, but there is a letter from Wernside which must be answered at once.'

'I will go,' replied Olive, and turning sharp away from the store, she passed along a narrow lane between mounds of earth thrown out from the copper workings, and so reached the banks of the creek, from whence it was only a short half-mile to the Point, where Ezra Pratt was overseeing the loading of some of his household goods on to a scow, for transmission to Wernside.

It was tremendously hot walking in the sun this morning. But it was hotter still and indescribably stuffy in the little kitchen behind the store, so Olive welcomed the journey as a pleasant diversion from toil, and began to feel quite festive in consequence.

The creek, which was really a river, came down from Lake Tayu, sixty miles away. Some people declared this to be a direct course to the Pelly River, as there was an Indian trail that led straight from the lake, through the Campbell Mountains to the Pelly valley. But Olive had never seen anyone who had made the journey, and she believed that the route existed more in imagination than in actual fact. Indeed, most navigation stopped at the Point,

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because just above there was a bit of rough water entailing a long portage.

Great was her astonishment this morning, on reaching the spot, to find a man clinging to some big upstanding boulders in mid-stream, and crying feebly for help.

For a minute she stood stupidly staring at him, thinking that he must be some miner who had gone for a bath or a swim, all unaware of the treacherous character of the creek at this part, and getting out of his depth had been taken with panic.

But this man had got his clothes on, and the white face he turned to her, as she came into view between the choke-berry bushes, had a ghastly streak of red across it as if he had been wounded by being dashed against the rocks, which showed jagged, ugly points here and there in the swiftly flowing current.

'Help, help!' called the poor fellow, his tone so exhausted that Olive felt her heart give a great jump, for she guessed that, if he were to be saved, it would have to be done quickly.

'Can you swim?' she cried out anxiously, although it would be a feat for an exhausted man to get through that bit of rushing current, between the rocks and the bank on which she stood; for at this point the creek had widened, to narrow in between high banks further on, where it hurried down towards the Point.

'Not now, I'm hurt,' he answered dully.

A sob caught in Olive's throat, almost choking her. Whatever could she do? She could

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not swim herself ; the very thought of a plunge into the racing current made her shiver with horror and dread. Never, never would she forget that awful moment when she had dropped into the water in the flooded school house at Redway Falls. But because she had been saved from that dire peril then, she had got to do her best now for this poor creature clinging to the rocks in that swift-flowing current.

Only the question was, what could she do ?

It was half a mile to the Point. Even if she were to run all the way, it would be a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes before she could get back with help, and her instinct told her that the man could not hold out so long.

Then suddenly an inspiration came to her, and she shouted, ' I can save you, I am sure that I can do it, only just hold on for a few minutes longer ! '

' I'm nearly done ! ' gasped the poor fellow ; but Olive had dashed back by the way she had come, and did not even hear what he said. Hurrying through the thicket of choke-berries, she reached the deserted copper-working, where she had seen some loose planks lying. Seizing two of these, and dragging one in each hand, she ran back again, panting and perspiring, for the boards were thick and heavy.

It was fearfully hard work getting them through the bushes, but when at last she emerged with them on the bank of the creek, she saw to her dismay that the man had dropped lower in the water, which was now almost to his shoulders.

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'I am coming, I can help you now!' she shouted, making her voice loud and vigorous, on purpose to cheer him; but he made no response, and she was dreadfully afraid that he was too exhausted even to realize that any one was speaking to him.

In fear and trembling she pushed one of the boards out into the creek, until the end rested on a boulder. Then, lifting the other with both hands, she walked out on to the rickety bridge, carrying it with her.

The board under her feet wobbled in a horridly sickening fashion. The one she carried in her hands threatened to over-balance her; and the sight of the rushing water just below her turned her so sick that it was wonderful that she did not topple over. It was only by fixing her eyes on the poor fellow clinging to the rocks that she managed the passage of that unsteady bridge. Crouching cautiously when she reached the end, she lowered the board she carried, until it rested with one end on the boulder supporting the first plank, and the other end just reached to the rock to which the man was clinging.

But the rocks were not the same height, and the crossing of the second plank would be a more fearsome business than even the passage of the first had proved. Quaking inwardly, Olive essayed to cross it by walking upright, but had to drop on all fours in the middle, because she felt so bad.

'I am coming; I am almost there!' she exclaimed in a brisk tone, as she struggled

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along the second plank frog-fashion. Her great fear was that the poor fellow would slip his hold before she could reach him, in which case she knew that he must be drowned.

At last! Trembling, but exultant, she gripped him by the arms, drawing a long breath of relief which, to her very great disgust, tailed off in a sob.

'I will help you all I can, but you must help yourself too, or I cannot save you even now,' she said sharply; for although she was pulling and struggling, the man appeared to be making not the slightest effort towards his own rescue.

'I am done!' he faltered, with so much despair in his tone, that another sob came up in Olive's throat, and such a wave of pity surged into her heart, that she resolved to get him on to the board somehow, even if she had to lift him by sheer force of arm.

'Oh, but you can help a little. I am sure that you can help a little if you try,' she said, in a coaxing tone. 'Now see, I am going to grip you by the leather belt round your waist, and I want you to put your arm round my neck; then, if you cling very tightly, I am sure that I can get you up, for I am very, very strong.'

'But I shall make you wet,' objected the unknown, and Olive burst into nervous laughter.

'I shall get wetter still if I have to plunge into the water and drag you out, and I have such a desperate horror of water, too; so please, please do as I want you to,' she pleaded, her voice breaking in an unsteady

quaver, as she thought how very helpless she would be if she did have to plunge into the water to try to get him out.

For answer he put up his right hand and slid it round her neck, but with his left he gripped the board on which she was kneeling. Then slipping her hand through the leather belt which was round him, she gave a great heave, and although she was nearly choked by the closeness of his clasp about her neck, she was overjoyed to find that she was pulling him up, and that he was helping himself sufficiently to keep from slipping back again.

‘Hurrah ! we shall do it, hurrah !’ she gasped, in panting encouragement; then bent again to her task, and with two more heaves succeeded in landing him high, but not dry, on the board.

‘Ah !’ it was a groan of agony which broke from him, as the final heave jerked him on to the board. Then Olive saw that one foot hung limp and helpless as if a bone were broken.

‘I have hurt you awfully ! Oh, I am so very sorry !’ she cried, in such contrition that the man made an effort to reassure her.

‘It is nothing to matter. I have hurt my foot, and it wrenched a bit just then,’ he replied, trying to look as if he were not hurt, but his white lips and drawn face told another story.

‘What shall I do ? I shall have to drag you across the boards, if you can’t crawl, and I am afraid that will hurt you dreadfully too,’ she said, wondering how she would get him

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from one board to the other, or keep him from falling off, when the rickety bridges wobbled.

'I won't make a fuss if I can help it, and if I do, please don't take any notice of it,' said the man, speaking in a strained tone, as if his endurance were almost at an end.

'You have only got to keep up until we reach the bank, and then you can give way; but until then you must be strong, and help me,' she went on, in a brusque manner, for the thought of that junction of the boards fairly frightened her.

But she had not got him so far to fail now. Setting her teeth hard, she crept backwards literally inch by inch, dragging him along, and fairly holding her breath, lest he should topple into the water.

The end of the first board was reached, and then, to her delight, he roused himself to make an effort on his own behalf.

'Just steady me a bit, and I think that I can do it,' he murmured valiantly, though there was a grey tinge on his face, which it frightened her to look at.

Thankfully she bowed her head, so that he might slide his wet arm round her neck again, and then progressing backwards still, she had the satisfaction of getting him safely on to the second board, from whence it was a comparatively easy matter to reach the bank.

But that effort of getting on to the second board was the last that he was able to make, and it was a limp, unconscious figure which Olive drew up on to the warm, sun-bank of

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the creek ; then dropped down beside him, because she was too exhausted to move.

Then fearing that he might die if help did not come quickly, she struggled to her feet and set off back towards the store. She had forgotten all about her errand to the Point which had brought her to the creek-side, but she would have gone back in any case, as it was the nearest place at which to get assistance.

Pushing through the thicket of choke-berries, she tried to run, but found that she had no strength to go beyond a slow, uncertain kind of walk. The sun poured down upon her back, she felt faint and dizzy, and was beginning to wonder if she would ever reach the store, although it was now quite close at hand. Then to her delight she saw a figure coming down the opposite hill, and recognizing it to be Gretchen, she immediately began to feel better.

' Olive, Olive, where have you been, and what have you been doing ? ' cried the younger sister, in wonder and dismay.

Olive looked down at herself, realizing for the first time what an object she must look. Her cotton skirt was wet, dirty, torn almost from waist to hem ; her hair was hanging loose, where the man's grip of her neck had pulled it from its fastenings, and one hand was bleeding profusely from a scratch.

' I have been saving a man who was drowning, and now he is lying in a faint on the bank ; can you come and help me get him up here ? ' asked Olive, feeling uncommonly as if she were

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going to faint herself, but striving hard to overcome the horrid sick sensation which was stealing upon her.

'Here, sit down and rest a bit. I will bring you a drink of water, then you will feel better,' said Gretchen, rising to the situation with most commendable promptitude. Then she pushed Olive down on to a raisin-box, which stood on the shady side of the store, and bolting into the house, quickly returned with a tin mug of water.

Mrs. Pratt bustled out too, with much comment and exclamation.

'Oh dear, oh dear, Miss Scarth, how awfully white you look! You've been dragging a man out of the creek, your sister says. Shocking risky work, it must have been, and the chances are that he isn't worth the trouble you've took over him after all. There are precious few men in these parts that I would wet my feet in pulling out of a puddle; no, that I wouldn't!'

But the water had done Olive good, banishing the faintness and bringing her back to her normal condition.

'The poor man is lying in a swoon on the bank; we must take the hand-truck and bring him up here. I am very much afraid that he has a broken leg, and he looks fearfully ill,' she said, waving her hand towards a rough, home-made truck, standing at a little distance, and which Gretchen at once hurried to fetch.

'He is not going to be brought here. No, that he is not!' cried Mrs. Pratt, instantly on the defensive, while a look of positive fear

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came on her worn face. 'Miss Scarth, it is of no use; I can't be bothered with having a sick man here, and a stranger too, not even if he has to lie out there and die for want of tending. Do you hear? I can't have him, and I won't!'

'But someone must have him; he must be taken care of!' expostulated Olive, in a shocked tone. The store was the nearest place, and it had seemed only natural to her that he should be brought there.

'Then take him yourself, and let your ma nurse him,' cried Mrs. Pratt, beginning to sob with hysterical violence. 'There are plenty of women at your house to look after sick folks. In fact, I should think that you would all be tumbling over each other for want of a job. But he isn't coming here.'

'Come, Gretchen, we must make haste, or he will die,' said Olive sharply; and with never a glance at Mrs. Pratt, she took hold of one side of the truck handle, and set off with Gretchen towards the creek.

'Oh, what a horrid, selfish little woman!' exclaimed Gretchen, in scorn and disgust.

'She can't help it; think what her life is,' said Olive, shaking her head; and then she stumbled on a little faster, although she was feeling weak and shaky still.

The poor fellow was lying just as she had left him. He seemed quite unconscious still, for which she felt rather thankful, as she knew how badly they would have to hurt him in getting him on to the truck.

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It was fearfully hard work lifting him, although they were both strong and capable. Then when he was safely landed on the truck, Olive found that she must walk behind, supporting him by holding up his head and shoulders, while Gretchen went in front and pulled the truck.

They chose the smoothest path they could find, but even the best was bad, so far as smoothness went, and their progress was slow, because of the hot sun beating upon them.

Mrs. Scarth was pottering about outside the house door, watering the pumpkin plants, when the two girls came toiling up the slope with the truck from the store, and an apparently dead man lying upon it.

With a faint cry she came running forward, thinking of her husband; but when she saw it was only a stranger that was cast on her care and kindness, she at once set to work to do her good motherly best for him.

'Bring him into the shed,' she said, with a quick grasp of the situation, 'the house is too small to accommodate a sick stranger, but we can make him quite comfortable here. His leg is broken, you say? Well then, Olive, we will just send Gretchen down to the Point, for Jeff Morgan to come up and set it at once before it swells.'

But before Gretchen could start to do her mother's bidding, after helping to put the hurt man on the bed in the shed, Dora came tearing in, hatless and breathless, with streaming hair and wild eyes.

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'Mother, mother!' she cried, 'father's canoe has come floating down creek to the Point, but father isn't there, and the men are saying that he must be drowned!'

CHAPTER THE NINTH

Who was He ?

'DORA, how could you blurt out bad news in such a fashion ?' cried Olive, angry at her sister's indiscretion, for Mrs. Scarth turned white and reeled, as if she were going to faint.

But Dora, plumping down on a box which stood just inside the door, burst into a fit of weeping ; while Gretchen with a hunted look in her eyes, dashed away in the direction of the Point, to see for herself if this direful news could be true.

Olive caught the swaying figure of her mother in her arms, holding the dear form in a close clasp, while she whispered every endearment she could think of, in her own pain and confusion. 'Darling mother, don't feel so bad about it, please don't. There is a big blunder somewhere, and dear father isn't drowned at all ; oh, I am sure of it. Be brave, mother ; it will all be right somehow !'

'Oh, Olive, think of the irony of it ; to be so near home, and then to die ;' sobbed Mrs. Scarth, gasping, and almost choking, as she fought her tendency to swoon.

'We won't believe it, mother dear, we won't believe it for a moment !' said Olive decidedly. 'Just come into the house and sit

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down, while I get into a tidier frock, then I will go down to the Point, and look at the canoe. I don't suppose that it is father's at all; it is just a stupid mistake.'

'I should be thankful to sit and rest quietly, for my heart is beating so badly that it makes me feel quite sick. But we can't leave this poor man alone in his present condition,' faltered Mrs. Scarth, who, even in her own bitter trouble, could not forget the need of the helpless stranger whom fate had flung on her care that day.

'Dora must stay with him. We can't do anything more for him until Jeff Morgan comes,' Olive said with decision, as she drew her mother towards the open door.

'Oh, I can't bear to be left here alone with him; he looks just like that other poor man who died. Where did he come from, and what is the matter with him?' asked Dora, who had left off crying, and now came to stand beside the rough bed on which they had laid the unconscious stranger.

'I found him stranded on the rocks, in the creek just below the store, and I had fearful trouble in getting him on to the bank,' said Olive; and then as a sudden thought struck her, she burst out vehemently, 'Why, of course it must have been the poor fellow's canoe that you mistook for father's! Oh, Dora, how could you be so foolish? And then to rush home and frighten mother in such a fashion was downright cruel.'

If Olive had had her nerves under proper

control, she would maybe not have spoken so sharply. But she was shaken, and exhausted with the strain of all that she had gone through, and therefore was not so much mistress of herself as usual.

'I am very sorry,' said Dora meekly, 'but I had to frighten someone, because I was so badly scared myself. It was the men who were loading Ezra Pratt's scow at the Point who told me that it was father's canoe which had come down the creek, and then they told me that he must be drowned, because he was not in the canoe. They wanted me to go and look at the thing, but I was afraid, and ran home instead. Oh, mumsie, mumsie, if any harm has come to our darling daddy, I shall never be happy again, never !'

'Hush, hush, dearie, don't sob like that, or you will certainly make yourself ill!' exclaimed Mrs. Scarth, freeing herself from Olive's protecting clasp, and sitting down on the box beside Dora, whom she tried to comfort, as one might soothe a terrified child.

'Mother, come indoors and rest, please do,' pleaded Olive, who was greatly concerned on her mother's account, but felt something like a desire to shake Dora for giving way so utterly.

'I don't feel to need it, dear, if it is not your father's canoe that has got into difficulties,' Mrs. Scarth replied calmly. 'But I just can't bear to see one of my girls grieving like this, and darling Dora always did let her feelings run away with her. Go and get into another frock, Olive, then walk down to the

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Point, if you feel strong enough. You will be able to find out then why the men chose to frighten this poor child so badly.'

Olive nodded, then slipped away in all haste to change her dress, realizing as she went that Dora's breakdown was not such a bad thing after all, if it drew her mother's attention from acute anxiety on her father's account.

Twisting her hair up anyhow, and slipping on another frock, she hastened out of the house, and took the road to the Point. What a queer, exciting day it was proving; and the strain of it was harder to bear than the heaviest work she had ever done.

As she passed the store, it was in her mind to step in and tell Mrs. Pratt that she could not possibly come to work that day. But something held her back, and she kept on her way steadily, while the midday sun blazed down upon her, until she turned into the welcome shade of a patch of scrub-larches; and when she emerged on the other side, she was in sight of the Point.

Quite a number of people were gathered in a group on the bank of the creek, at the sharp bend which figured in section maps as Orsay Point, but which was locally shortened into the Point, for the sake of convenience.

Olive shivered, turning suddenly sick and faint as she realized that they must be clustered about the canoe, which had come down creek without a voyager in it.

But how foolish to be upset, when doubtless

it was a stupid mistake, and the canoe would prove to be the property of the poor fellow whom she had with so much difficulty rescued from the rocks below the store.

Taking herself to task in a vigorous fashion, she went forward as quickly as she could, putting her feet down with a stamp at every step, because she felt so queer and wobbly, and the stamping seemed somehow to restore her courage.

Evidently the group saw her coming, for they broke and scattered, only two or three remaining beside some object on the ground, which of course must be the canoe.

'Ah, there is Gretchen, now I shall know!' she exclaimed, with a dry little sob; and then she stopped short, feeling that she simply could not take another step forward, until she knew what there was to be known.

Gretchen came slowly along, her head poked forward, her shoulders bowed, and her face drawn into a sort of convulsed pucker, which would have been comic if it had not been so terribly suggestive of the very bad news that lay behind.

'Oh, Olive, I am thankful that you have come down; I was just thinking of coming up to fetch you, for it is altogether a most mysterious business,' Gretchen burst out in eager tones as soon as she was within shouting distance.

'Is it—is it father's canoe?' panted Olive.

'Yes, without doubt, for the name, Jacob Scarth, is plain to be seen on the inside, where

Benny and I burned it in with a red-hot poker before father started,' said Gretchen, adding eagerly, ' But I don't believe that father came down creek in that canoe; I think the man who brought it down must have been that stranger, whom you rescued from the rocks. Of course dear father would have had too much sense to do such a mad thing as to try shooting those rapids; besides, there would be no reason in his doing so, as he would be nearer home above them.'

' Of course, of course, we might have thought of that ! ' exclaimed Olive, who was feverishly eager to be convinced; then she asked anxiously, ' But if it is father's canoe, then where is father ? '

Gretchen's face grew suddenly hard, and she said sharply, ' Ah, that is what we want to know, and when that man we carried home comes to his senses, that is what he will have to tell us. I have sent Jeff Morgan up to our house to set the broken leg, as mother wished, but he went the other way, because he would not meet you.'

Olive nodded, and looked after Jeff Morgan's retreating figure with a dull thankfulness for his delicacy in avoiding her. He was making a path of his own through the scrub-larches, and would doubtless be badly scratched with bramble-thorns before he got through; but it was easier for him just then to run the risk of any number of scratches, than to face Olive and have to answer her possible questions.

Olive gripped at Gretchen's arm to support

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herself, as she walked up to the canoe which had been drawn high up out of the water. It was battered in appearance, as if it had seen very rough usage indeed; one side was almost stove in, and it had evidently begun to leak badly.

Olive dropped on her knees beside it, and began to turn over the bags and bundles which were stowed in the canoe, and which by some miraculous chance had not been upset into the water when the little craft came down the rapids.

She had a right to turn over these things, which no one there would have ventured to dispute. None of the onlookers had attempted to lay a finger on the lading of the little craft, since they had seen the name of Jacob Scarth burned into the side.

There was an odd assortment of refreshments tied up in those bundles, and Olive turned them over with a vague distrust of her own right to search through these articles, which had certainly never belonged to her dear father. Some pipes, a small packet of plug tobacco of the very rankest and coarsest description. Two or three cheap novelettes, of the kind that Jacob Scarth would have scorned to touch. Some very rough and dirty clothing such as a prospector would wear. Then came a leather wallet, which she opened with a great trembling, for it was surely here that she would find the clue to the whole mystery.

The first thing that came out was a hard

knobby bundle, tied up in a faded blue handkerchief, which, like everything else, was very dirty indeed. Olive laid the bundle on the ground and untied the knots, revealing some lumps of earth with yellow streaks running through them.

'Oh, oh, it is gold, gold !' shrieked Gretchen, flinging up her arms and spinning round on the tips of her toes like a mad thing. 'Father has found the gold, now we shall be rich !'

An exclamation burst from the men who had drawn a little aside while the canoe was being searched, and now they made a simultaneous movement forward.

But Olive felt as if her senses were deserting her, for there was a stiff piece of paper inside the handkerchief, as if it had first been taken for wrapping round the lumps of earth, but proving insecure, had afterwards been tied round with the handkerchief to strengthen it. There was a copy written on one side of the paper, and on the other side a long multiplication sum was neatly set out in stiff, cramped figures; while underneath, in a child's unformed writing, was the name Amelia Foster, Redway Falls, and a date in the previous January.

What did it all mean ? Olive knelt on the ground, staring at the fragment from Amelia's copybook, while her memory carried her back to the day in last January, when that long multiplication sum was entered so neatly, and Amelia got top marks for tidiness.

But how did that bit of copybook get into the bundle of oddments which had come

down creek in her father's canoe? And what had been happening out there in the wilderness beyond the great morasses?

Gretchen was still shouting, 'It is gold, real gold, and father has found it!' but Olive put up her hand to stop the outcry, and beckoned to the men to come nearer.

'Is it gold?' she asked, pointing to the lumps of yellow-streaked earth lying on the handkerchief. 'And do you think that it is in paying quantities?'

The men came near, and dropped on their knees in an excited group round the handkerchief. Some of those who had gone away came back, and a thrill of excitement went through them all, for gold-seeking of that sort is only another name for gambling, the stakes being great riches, and the risks out of all proportion to the rewards.

One of the men had been in Alaska, working for one whole year at mining and sluicing, and it was to him that the others turned, as one might look to an oracle, or the decider of destiny, and the master of fate.

'No, it ain't gold. Not in my opinion, leastwise,' pronounced the oracle. 'It is what they call "false hope" in Alaska, so near like the real thing as to deceive any one but an expert, but good for nothing.'

A smothered cry burst from Gretchen, who covered her face with her hands, and stood so for a few moments, as if she would shut out the sight of her ruined hopes and aspirations.

But Olive had turned to the leather wallet

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again, and was pulling out the other things, eager to learn the best, or the worst, of all there was to discover.

Another bundle of earth, tied up this time in a fragment of a shirt-sleeve, and then at the very bottom of the wallet a flat packet, carefully wrapped in another leaf from Amelia Foster's copybook.

Olive unwrapped the packet with trembling fingers, while her heart beat fast, and there was a noise in her ears like the surging of the sea. One piece of paper was unwrapped, then two; but when the third piece was unfolded, Olive uttered a wild and bitter cry, for there before her astonished gaze was the letter from her father, which had so mysteriously disappeared from her desk in the flooded school-house, and with it the map marked in red and blue crosses, which he had sent for her to see.

'What is it, Miss; what have you found?' asked the man from Alaska, touching her gently on the arm to attract her attention. He thought that tidings of her father's death must have come to her, from the medium of that packet in its many wrappings, and all the sympathy of his rough nature was stirred by the sight of the despair in her face.

'It is treachery! Black, bitter treachery! And oh, my father, my dear, darling father, it is all my fault!' cried Olive. Then forgetting the presence of the men, who stood grouped about her in awed silence, she bowed her head to the edge of the battered old canoe, and burst into a fit of weeping.

'Is father dead?' asked Gretchen, her face going the colour of ashes, as, kneeling beside Olive, she slid an arm round her waist, trying to comfort her. But Olive was too overcome by violent sobbing to answer her, so Gretchen, with her one free hand, proceeded to explore the packet for herself.

'Why, it is the letter father sent you, and the map!' she cried, her voice rising in a rapid crescendo, until it reached a shriek of pure amazement.

Then Ezra Pratt, who was one of the group of men standing round, and who considered himself in a way the friend and benefactor of the family, moved a step or two nearer, and asked, 'What letter? Has your father sent a letter?'

'No, no,' gasped Gretchen, whose wonder and fear made her incoherent. 'At least father wrote the letter, only it was a long time ago, back in the early spring before he went away, and he sent it to my sister at Redway Falls. But it was stolen from her, at least I mean it was missing from her desk, when the school-house got drowned out, and with it the map of the route that father was to take to find the gold. So he had to go off without a map, except what he could remember in his head. And now here it is in his canoe, but how did it get there?'

'Gold! you mean to say that your pa went fossickin' round for gold—he?' demanded the man from Alaska, with as much amazement in his tone as he might have displayed if any

one had told him that Mrs. Pratt and her babies had set forth on a similar expedition.

'Yes, but he knew where to go; at least he thought he did,' stammered Gretchen, growing frightened and confused, as she wondered if she had said too much. All the young Scarths had guarded so carefully the secret of the information given by the dying stranger, that it seemed quite dreadful to her to think that she had let it out.

It was Ezra Pratt who came nearer to Olive then, and his tone was so urgent, that it roused her from her grieving at once.

'Miss Scarth, won't you tell us all you can about it, where your father went, and why? It can't hurt for anyone to know now. There's not a man here that wouldn't respect his claim pegs, if he had found colour, I take it.'

'That's so, that's so, you may reckon on us,' burst in hoarse murmurs from the group gathered round; and to their honour be it known, they meant what they said.

'And it is only "false hope," when you've done and said all,' commented the man from Alaska, as if he would remind his weaker brethren that the temptation in this case was not worth yielding to.

Olive lifted her head then, and in a few brief broken words told the story of how the dying man had given her father certain information which he had set out to act upon. Then she spoke of how the letter had disappeared, and finally she told that group of men what she had never spoken of before:

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how she had overheard two men talking of another man who had found a letter telling of a gold find, and had set off hot-foot to get to the place first.

' Why didn't you speak of it then? Couldn't you trust any of us? ' asked Ezra Pratt in deep chagrin. ' Your father told me something of his plans, and would have told me more, only I warned him not to, on the principle of least said soonest mended. But this was different and ought to have been looked into.'

' I know, and I meant to have gone into the supper-room and made the men tell me the name of that other one; but just then there were shots and screams, and it was those two men who were killed,' Olive replied with a shudder.

' And you never let on to anybody about what you'd heard? ' demanded the man from Alaska, in great astonishment.

' No; I did not like to alarm my mother and sisters, for no amount of talking would have done any good,' she replied faintly.

' Well, you are the very first woman I ever knowed as could keep a secret of any sort, and you ain't more than a bit of a girl by the looks of you. I'm downright proud to make your acquaintance, that I am,' and the man from Alaska swept his battered old hat from his head, with an admiring flourish more eloquent than words.

Olive just bowed her head in acknowledgment, and then turned eagerly to Ezra Pratt,

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whom she trusted because she knew that his judgment was sound, and because her father had trusted him likewise.

'What shall we do?' she asked. 'Do you think that we could send a search party to look for my father? It is plain to me that he also found the gold, or what he thought was gold. But there has been treachery somewhere. Probably the other man found the place which was marked on the map, and then it seems as if he must have found father too. What happened after that is pure conjecture, but it looks to me as if this person must have stolen my father's canoe, and left him to perish miserably in the wilderness.'

'It does look like it, a bit,' said Ezra Pratt slowly, but with a qualifying limitation in his tone, which showed loopholes for wiser after-judgments. 'But you've got matters in your own hands, seeing that the man is at your house, and can't run away, however much he may want to do so. You've got to play a waiting game so far as I can see, and perhaps in the end you may find that things are not quite so bad as they look. Your father may even have joined forces with this chap you picked off the rocks, and have sent him home to register, and take back supplies. It ain't ever wise to condemn a man until you hear what he has got to say in his own defence.'

'He must have been a thief in the first place,' objected Olive, in a spirited tone.

'Well, as to that there's a difference of opinion, as to whether getting a gold secret

could ever be called thieving. There is many a man who reckons himself a highly moral person, who goes to meetin' regular, and wouldn't tell lies on paper to save his life almost, but yet wouldn't think it any sin to pull out his neighbour's claim pegs, or do any other sort of cheating to get gold,' said Ezra Pratt, in a judicial tone. Then he offered to have the canoe and all it contained carried up from the Point to her mother's house free of charge, a kindness which Olive accepted with sincere gratitude.

She and Gretchen walked home hand in hand behind the wagon, on which the canoe was being carried up the hill. It was like a funeral at which they two were chief mourners, and to Gretchen at least it was the funeral of many hopes, and many ardent ambitions.

If the supposed gold was not gold at all, then there was no hope or prospect that their father, even if he were still alive, would ever be rich. So her brilliant castles in the air crumbled into ruins at her feet, and as the wagon with the canoe turned up past the unfinished hotel and entered the land which they had cultivated with so much hard work and pains-taking, she said in a tone that was sharp with regret, 'So we shall have to depend upon ourselves after all !'

'What do you mean ?' asked Olive in surprise, for it was the first time either had broken silence since the wagon had started from the Point.

'I mean that, if we want to get on in the

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world, we shall have to do it ourselves,
Gretchen said almost resentfully.

'Of course. But that after all is the only
real way, the only way that lasts,' replied
Olive.

CHAPTER THE TENTH

The Waiting

Mrs. SCARTH was in the shed with Jeff Morgan, who was setting the stranger's broken leg. Olive thought at first that Dora must be in there too, as she was not to be seen. But the mother said no: Dora had fled away on Jeff Morgan's approach, from fear that the injured man would groan or cry out when his damaged limb was being set and bound.

'She is hiding somewhere, I expect,' said Gretchen, with a sort of pitying tolerance. 'Although Dora is so pretty, she has no pluck at all, and is frightened out of her senses if anyone is ill or has a bad pain.'

'We must find her then, for I want to talk to her about the things we have found.' Olive said, as they went into the house together, after the men had lifted the canoe from the wagon, and left it lying outside the door. 'I want to ask her how much she thinks we ought to tell mother. Poor mother, she will be so frightfully worried, and will think that all sorts of evil things must have happened to dear father!'

'I don't know what Dora will say; but I think that mother ought to be told everything that we know. It is torment anyway, but it will not be quite so hard for her to bear, if

we can look her in the face, and say to her that this is all we know ourselves,' replied Gretchen, with that simple directness of thought and speech which solved so many problems.

Olive looked dreadfully worried. 'Perhaps you are right,' she said thoughtfully; 'but I should have been so thankful to have kept all this harrowing suspense from her a while longer if it had been prudent or possible. Anyhow we will find Dora, and hear what she has to say about it, then the majority shall decide what is best to be done.'

Gretchen emitted a sound between a grunt and a snort, then commenced an active search through the bare little house, which offered no great choice of hiding-places. Finally she discovered Dora lying in bed, with a pillow over her head, and promptly dragged her to a sitting posture.

'Oh, don't, don't! I beg of you leave me alone; I am so afraid that I shall hear that poor man scream, and I am sure that I could not bear it. I should swoon away, I might even die,' said Dora, with a gasping sigh; then she made a vigorous, but ineffectual clutch at her pillow.

But Gretchen was obdurate, and her tone was downright grim, as she said shortly, 'Sit up, and don't be a silly baby. Olive and I have got something far, far worse for you to hear than a few shrieks and groans from a man who is only being hurt in order that he may get better all the quicker.'

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'Is it about father, and is he dead?' demanded Dora, sitting erect on her mattress, and becoming suddenly womanly in her manner, for it was characteristic of her that although a little trouble made her behave like a foolish child, a really big one always developed the latent womanliness in her.

Olive came into the room at this moment, and sitting on the bed began at the beginning, and told Dora all that there was to be known of actual fact, doubt, and suspicion.

'Oh, it is plain to me what has happened!' cried Dora, beating with clenched fists on the mattress. 'That little cat Amelia Foster must have stolen your letter that morning, before the flood came in. Everything points to it. Then I expect she told her father, ~~that~~ odious school-manager who bundled you off home in such a hurry, so that he might start off on his journey to steal father's gold without arousing your suspicions. Why, it is as plain as the nose in your face! How wanting you must be in penetration, Olive, not to have seen it for yourself!'

'I might have done, if it had all fallen out just as you suppose,' said Olive quietly. 'But to begin with—Amelia Foster was not at school that morning when the flood came, and had not been there for a week, because she was unwell. Then when Mrs. Baldwin wrote last week, she told me that Mr. Foster had been poorly for more than two months, and was only just beginning to get about again.'

'Very well, it must have been someone else

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then. Isn't there any one at Redway Falls whom you in any way suspect ?' Dora asked impatiently. ' If I had been in your place now, I should have fixed on half a dozen people before this.'

' But it would have done no good, if you had merely jumped to conclusions, as you did about the Fosters,' interposed Gretchen, who still stood holding the pillow, as if she were thinking of throwing it at somebody's head, though indeed nothing could have been farther from her thoughts just then than such a flippant thing as a pillow fight.

' The question is—ought we to tell mother ?' said Olive wistfully. No one knew how she dreaded that her mother should have to know what cause there was for keen apprehension concerning the dear absent father's fate. She could bear pain and keen anxiety herself, without much flinching; but it was terrible to her that she must bring suffering to someone else, and that someone the dear mother, who had been so shielded and sheltered from hardship and responsibility.

' Of course we must tell her,' pronounced Dora emphatically. ' Fancy how awful it would be to keep a secret from her, and the continual risk of having it pop out at any unguarded moment. And I never, never can keep a secret of any sort or kind : my nature is too transparent. Besides, it will not be half so hard for her to know that a thief has stolen father's canoe, as it would be for her to fret and worry herself with thinking that father had

been drowned somewhere on the journey down creek.'

'I had not thought of that!' exclaimed Olive, with a relieved air, catching at the suggestion as a drowning man might clutch at a straw. 'Will you tell her, Dora, or must I?'

'You, of course. I should make an awful muddle of it, and very likely frighten her into an apoplectic fit, or something equally serious. I have no gift for making bad news palatable, but when you have anything hard to communicate, I notice that faith and hope shine from your eyes, and your whole person emanates a sort of courage that is stimulating and infectious.'

'Don't make fun, Dora; I can't bear it just now,' said Olive, with a strained look on her face, for the situation was almost more than she could endure.

'I was not making fun; nothing was farther from my thoughts,' answered Dora. 'I only spoke as I felt. But look here, Olive, do beat your brains a bit, and tell me if there is anyone whom you can in the least suspect of having walked off with that letter.'

Olive hesitated, turned a little paler, then said slowly, 'There was only one person whom it seemed in any way possible to connect with the affair, and yet it is the meanest thing in the world to accuse him, even in my thoughts.'

'Name, name!' cried Dora impatiently, drubbing with her fists on the mattress again, while her heels tapped smartly on the floor, in order to hurry her sister.

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'I don't know his name,' faltered Olive, looking miserably ashamed of herself, as she put her vague suspicion into words. 'But the man who rescued me from the flooded schoolhouse was in such a dreadful hurry to get away afterwards, so Mrs. Baldwin said, although before he had been apparently going to stay for some time. So he got one of the men to guide him overland to catch the boat at Fort Simpson, and they started at dawn next morning.'

'Humph, it looks queer!' ejaculated Dora, wrinkling her nose and frowning hard. 'Would you know him again? What was he like?'

Olive shook her head. 'I am not sure: I was so dazed and frightened, you see, and besides his face was bound up with a handkerchief, and there was a red stain on it, as if he had hurt himself. But it seems wicked even to mention his name in the same breath with such a suspicion.'

'You can't mention his name if you don't know it,' scoffed Dora. 'But if you had one good look at him, you surely must have got some general idea of what he was like. Was he built like a butcher, or a poet, or a sea-captain, or a lawyer?'

'I am sure I cannot tell you,' Olive answered, with a laugh. 'The only thing which struck me about him was the set of his chin, like—like—'

'Like what?' demanded Dora sharply.

Olive frowned, as if from severe mental effort; then said wonderingly, 'Now where

have I seen a chin like that? Oh, I remember, that picture of Tony is like it.'

'Perhaps it was Tony,' suggested Gretchen, who was much given to wild guessing and similar flights of fancy.

'Of course it must have been,' said Dora, with a short laugh. 'And doubtless he was on his way up here to steal our dear gold mine, which after all is not worthy of the name, according to expert evidence on the sample. Oh dear, oh dear, how awful it was that dear father should have gone away, and all these troubles to be dumped upon us, just for nothing at all! No, no, Olive, don't preach to me about the sweet and sacred uses of adversity, because I won't stand it. I know that you have not done it yet, but I can see the words burning on your tongue, and although you may find disaster a useful corrective, I don't. I expect my nature is too shallow to be improved, so all I ask for is to be let alone;' and rolling herself into a heap on the lumpy mattress, Dora burst into a storm of tears.

Olive did not stay to comfort her, for at that moment she heard the mother's voice calling, and hurried out to find Mrs. Scarth in anxious talk with Jeff Morgan, who looked the other way when Olive approached, which was his way of showing sympathy.

'Olive dear, Mr. Morgan thinks the poor man has had a very bad chill and is in for an attack of fever,' said Mrs. Scarth, with more energy than was usual with her.

'What shall we do with him?' cried Olive, aghast, for an attack of fever might easily mean rheumatic fever, which would entail weeks, perhaps months of unremitting nursing.

'Oh, we must just do the best that we can,' replied her mother, in an easy tone. 'What a good thing it is that I have you at home to help me, for dear Dora is so afraid of sick people, and Gretchen is too young to be of much use in looking after an invalid.'

It was on the tip of Olive's tongue to say that she was afraid too. But she checked the utterance, determined not to show the white feather if she could help it. She marvelled at the interest and excitement displayed by her mother, until she remembered how, in years gone by, a baby sister who came between Gretchen and Bluey had died, and her mother had been broken-hearted at first, until Gretchen went down with scarlet fever, and needed so much nursing that Mrs. Scarth seemed quite to forget her sorrow for the dead child, in the unceasing care which had to be given to the living one.

That it was a stranger who claimed her kindness now, made no real difference: it was the absorbing need which would engross her. And Olive realized with something like a pang, that until this stranger recovered or died, Mrs. Scarth would give herself no time to sit down and grieve over her husband's absence, and the mystery overshadowing his fate.

Yet it was better so. There might even be no real reason for grieving. Mr. Scarth

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had probably joined forces with this man, and sent him down creek to make arrangements for registering the claim in their joint names.

But even while she tried to comfort herself with this sort of reasoning, Olive knew that she put no faith in it, and her heart ached with bitter pain and the dire perplexity of it all.

What was she to do? What could she do? Ezra Pratt and the other men had said that there was nothing to be done until the sick man recovered sufficiently to explain the mystery, or at least so much of it as concerned himself and his possession of Jacob Scarth's canoe.

But suppose he would not tell?

'There are those in Orsay who will make him tell, if only he gets better enough to be forced into speaking,' she muttered to herself, setting her lips in resolute lines, as she turned away to find Gretchen, and ask her to go down to the store to let Mrs. Pratt know that she could not possibly come that day.

'Shall I stay down there and do what I can?' asked Gretchen. 'We shall not have their money or the chance of earning it very long, and I suppose that we shall need it more than ever now, with this sick man to keep. Oh, it does seem hard that we, who are so burdened, should have this extra load flung on us!'

'As it happens, I would rather we had the man than that he should have been taken anywhere else. For we shall have our chance of getting to know how it was that he came to be in possession of father's canoe,' replied Olive.

'But it would be as well if you stayed to help Mrs. Pratt, for of course she is dreadfully driven just now, poor little woman !'

'Oh, don't pity her—you make me feel sick !' exclaimed Gretchen, with a grimace. 'I never saw a person give herself away more completely than she did to-day, and she laid bare all the mean ugliness of her little soul. I am not going to help her out of any sort of pity, but only because I want to earn as much money as I can to pull down that dreadful debt. Oh, Olive, what shall we do if we have got to be poor always ? Poverty seems to wring out the ugly side of life !'

'We won't be poor all our lives. I have made up my mind to that,' said Olive cheerfully, although privately she was just about as depressed as it was possible to be.

'How can we be anything else, that is what I want to know ?' sighed Gretchen.

'Wait and see. We shall find the way directly we get clear of this muddle. Meanwhile you know what Kingsley says—

"Do the thing that's nearest,
Though it's dull at whiles."

—which in this case is Mrs. Pratt,' and with a flourish of her hands which was more expressive than words, Olive turned back to the shed, to help her mother with the sick man.

Jeff Morgan had done his work with considerable skill. He had received a good medical education, and might have been doing well, only, alas ! he was his own worst enemy, and

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had drifted lower and lower, until he became a miner, earning his living with pick and shovel. Whenever he succeeded in saving a few dollars, he went in for a wild burst of dissipation, which speedily brought him again to destitution, and the saving need of hard work.

But he had not quite forgotten all the culture and refinement of his earlier years, and he was sufficiently good-natured to be always willing to do his best for any one in trouble, and Mrs. Scarth knew that he might be trusted to look after the sick man as well as a fully qualified doctor. And no doctor lived within thirty miles of Orsay.

Jeff had stripped off the injured man's wet garments, had set and bound the broken limb in the most approved professional style, and then he had done his best in helping Mrs. Scarth make the shed into some semblance of a comfortable sick-room.

'And, Olive, he was so kind. He said that he would have come to stay all night with the poor man, so that we could all go to bed, but there is a man dying in a little shack, two miles further down the creek, and there is no one but Jeff to stay with him to-night,' said Mrs. Scarth, who was spreading a clean coverlet over the poor piece of flotsam Olive had rescued from the creek.

'I will sit up with him to-night, mother, only you will have to tell me what to do,' Olive said briskly. She had decided that the best way not to be afraid of the sick man was to do as much for him as possible, and had

quite determined in her own mind that she was not going to have her mother worn out with night-nursing.

' You can go to bed early, and I will wake you up at two o'clock; he will probably be past his worst by then, for this night at least, and I always sleep best towards morning,' Mrs. Scarth replied.

Olive was thankful to go to bed early that night: the day had been so long and full of strain. She slept like a log until midnight, when her mother came stealing into the quiet house, asking her to come and help, because the poor man was delirious, and in such a wild agony of pain that it seemed probable he would undo all Jeff Morgan's surgical work, and that the leg would have to be set over again when he had dropped into quiet once more.

With a shiver that she could not repress, Olive huddled her clothes on, and went to her mother's assistance. How she envied the other three girls and Benny who were lying so peacefully asleep, with all the worries and cares of the day forgotten! But someone must take the responsibility, and face the difficulties as they came; so looking as brave as possible, yet feeling a veritable coward at heart, she hurried out into the warm gloom of the night, which was not deep enough for darkness, though midsummer was long past.

' I cannot find him, I tell you I cannot find him anywhere!' wailed a voice, with such a pathos of bitterness, that Olive caught herself up on the verge of a sob as she pushed open the

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door of the shed, which stood slightly ajar, and entered to find her mother trying to keep the poor fellow from flinging himself out of bed in his wild delirium.

'Go to the other side, Olive, then I think we can manage him,' said Mrs. Scarth eagerly.

Olive obeyed, slipping up the narrow alley between the small bed and the rough wooden wall; and before she realized what she was doing, she had hold of the man's restless, burning hands, and was talking to him in a quiet, compelling manner, which she had found so useful in subduing the most mischievous of the boys in the school at Redway Falls.

'You must be quiet, and not worry. It is of no use to fret yourself into a fever; when you are better you will be able to find him, I am sure that you will be able to find him easily then,' she said soothingly, and the poor man stopped in his raving; then after staring at her in a perfectly rational manner for a minute or so, said in surprise, 'Now I wonder where it is that I have seen you before?'

'You need not wonder very long,' she answered, with a laugh. 'We met this morning in rather strenuous circumstances, and our introduction was very unconventional.'

'Was it this morning, are you sure?' he asked, his tone a little raised, and implying strong doubt.

'Yes; do you not remember that I got some boards, and crawled across the rocks to pull you out of the water?' she asked, wondering if his intent gaze at her face was the effect of

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delirium, or whether he were really in his right mind.

'It was I who pulled you out of the water, I think,' he said, with a smile. 'Don't you remember that you cannot swim?'

Olive stared at him aghast. But there was nothing in the flushed and much swollen face that seemed familiar, and Mrs. Scarth on the other side of the bed indicated, by a motion of her hand to her head, that the man was still delirious, so must be humoured and kept as quiet as possible. In fact anything and everything must be done to keep him from flinging himself about, and as Olive's voice seemed to have a soothing effect upon him, she went on talking in the hope of keeping him calm.

'No, I cannot swim, and I am most horribly afraid of water; are you?' she asked.

'Not when I have two legs to use,' he answered quietly; then suddenly the pain of his limbs seemed to rack him into delirious excitement once more, and he burst out, 'But that voyage across the lake was the most awful experience I have ever known. There was nothing on the Pelly that could equal it, and when we felt the raft parting in the middle during that dreadful gale, I never expected to see daylight again, never, never. But oh, it is frightful to be drowning in the dark!'

'Yet you were not drowned,' she said, trying to soothe him by putting a cool hand on his forehead.

'No, no, it was the other man that was drowned,' he said, with the sound of a wail in

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his tone, such as Olive had heard when she first entered the shed.

A sudden terror clutched at her heart and almost seemed to stop its beating. Was the other man her father? Was it possible that her dear, dear father had perished so, in the darkness and the storm? But what would her father be doing on a raft when he had his canoe light, strong, and manageable with him?

She stole a look at her mother, fearful lest the same thought might have come to her.

But Mrs. Scarth's face was quite placid, and resting her head against the pillow at the back of the rocking-chair in which she sat, she was drowsing gently into sleep.

'If only I could get him to tell me!' Olive muttered to herself, as she looked at the sufferer on the bed, who was not moaning now, but lying quite passive under the mesmeric influence of her gently moving hands. Then almost as if he read the wish in her heart, and was anxious to reassure her, he stirred restlessly, opened his eyes, and gazing fixedly at her, he said in a calm and perfectly rational tone, 'Oh, no, no, that was not the one you meant, and really he deserved his fate, for he was such a brute. But the other, he had been dead a long, long time, and he was quite unrecognizable. Ugh, what a place of tragedies this wilderness is! He had gold in abundance, and a good canoe. But why was he wearing Uncle Charlie's signet ring? Now, tell me that, and I will forgive you all the rest! No,

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it is of no use, it is not me. Uncle Charlie forgives you, and Cyril, Cyril, why can't I find you anywhere?"

Olive was just in time, and caught the poor fellow in her strong young arms, holding him fast. Mrs. Scarth woke up in a hurry and came to her help. The delirious one grew exhausted with raving, and consented to doze; Mrs. Scarth dropped asleep again, only to be aroused later on when the sick man broke out afresh; and so the slow hours wore on to the cheerful, wide-awake morning light. But Olive was wondering and wondering who was the other dead man, and where he had been found.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

A Chance of a Living

THE next afternoon Bluey and Benny came rushing home from school, eager to tell of a wonderful piece of news, which had filtered through to their ears during afternoon school.

The miners, what few were left, had been making a little collection among themselves and they had raised fifty dollars. This money had been handed over to Jeff Morgan, with instructions to bring it up to Mrs. Scarth, as their contribution towards the succouring of the sick stranger.

'But I cannot take money for being kind to a sick man,' said Mrs. Scarth, drawing herself up with an air of offended pride.

'Of course not; why, it is not to be thought of for one moment,' burst in Dora vehemently, a pink spot of anger showing in her cheek, and she clenched her small fist as if she would enjoy thumping every one of the rough but kindly miners who had dared to put such an insult upon them.

'But you will have to take what is given you,' objected Bluey, standing still in the middle of the floor, and staring at her mother and Dora, with a comical bewilderment on her chubby face. She knew that they were

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very poor, that it was an anxious business to find food enough of the very plainest sort to keep them from being hungry, so she could not understand why it was to be reckoned an insult, that money should be offered to them.

Dora tossed her head and laughed. ' My dear Bluey, you are only a baby and you haven't much sense either. Perhaps when you are older and wiser, you will understand how humiliating it is to be pauperized in such a fashion ! '

' Only a baby ! Why, I'm turned ten, and if I'm not very wise I'm top of the class, and I have kept top for a whole fortnight,' exclaimed Bluey in reproachful tones; then seeing Olive coming up the hill, she darted away to meet her eldest sister, and get the sympathy for which her hurt pride yearned.

' And fifty dollars is such a lot of money, Olive, that don't you think we might keep it, because we are so dreadfully poor ? ' pleaded the little girl, with a wistful look on her face, when she had poured out her story in an incoherent jumble of words.

' Yes, I think that we shall have to keep it, if only out of gratitude for the kindly thought which prompted these men to give the money,' said Olive, flashing a bright smile on Bluey, though there was a sudden moisture in her eyes, because her need of money was just then so sore that she simply did not know what to do, or where to turn for help in her dilemma.

' Just you go indoors and tell them that, and see what they will say ! ' cried Bluey,

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capering round in wild delight; then she became wistful again, and said anxiously, 'You will take the money, won't you, because we are so dreadfully poor, you know, and all the nice things have to be given to the poor sick man.'

A cloud came over Olive's face. She understood now why Bluey had come out of the house to beg her to take the money. No one could ever know, or even guess, how she hated to put herself in opposition to her mother, and Dora, and all the easy-going ways of life which had seemed so delightful in the past, and kept some of their old glamour still. It seemed to be her hard fate that the difficulties of life were turning her into a severely practical person, whether she would or no. And the trouble was that it had a tendency to divide the family, so that it was constantly the mother and Dora who were opposed to herself and Gretchen, a state of things all the more painful because Olive knew how much her father would have been hurt by even the suggestion of a rift in the home peace.

She walked indoors with rather a springless step; she had been at the store since early morning, while half of the previous night had been spent in taking care of the sick man, so that her mother might get a little sleep.

Dora was talking excitedly, while Mrs. Scarth was in the rocking-chair, swaying to and fro with an uneasy look on her face.

'When dear father comes home, and we are very rich, don't you suppose that it will be a grief to him to think we let ourselves sink so

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low as to take the charity of poor people to help us in his absence ?' cried Dora, with a flourish of her hands and a little private amazement at her own eloquence, for she thought that she had given utterance to a very fine sentiment indeed.

' Of course, my dear, of course,' murmured Mrs. Scarth vaguely. She was so tired out with the unaccustomed strain of sick-nursing, that she would rather have dozed in her chair than listen to high-flown sentiments just then; but she was never discourteous to her daughters, and always lent a patient ear to what they might have to say.

' Why, mummie, you do look tired ! Has the patient been worse than usual to-day ?' asked Olive, as she leaned over the chair and kissed her mother, forcing herself to look alert and cheerful while she tried to forget how very weary she was.

' He has been very ill all day, and in such wearing pain that it has quite wrung my heart to watch him,' Mrs. Scarth said, with a little sob of pure pity. Then she burst out with tremulous energy, ' Oh, Olive, Bluey has brought home a story about the miners having made a collection for us, to pay for the poor man being nursed and cared for.'

' It is very kind of them, for of course he does make a frightful lot of work, and he is a great expense too,' replied Olive calmly. ' I feel bad every time I take cream for him, because it means skim milk for Bluey and Benny, and we know that children need good food.'

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But of course a little extra money will put that right, and we shall not have to rob the children to feed him.'

This was putting the matter in quite a new light to Mrs. Scarth ; she ceased rocking, and sat bolt upright in her chair to stare at Olive ; but Dora exclaimed in a scandalized tone—

' Do you mean to say that you think we are going to demean ourselves by accepting the charity of a lot of vulgar miners ? Why, Olive, Olive, have you no pride at all ? '

' Yes, I am fearfully proud,' laughed Olive, ' and I wouldn't take charity ; I would work my fingers to stumps first. But this is not charity : it is neighbourly helpfulness, which is a vastly different thing. We are taking more than our share of a public burden, and if other people want to show their sense of responsibility in the matter, it is only right that they should do it.'

' We won't lower ourselves to take that money, I say we won't. It is not to be thought of, and mother must put her foot down about it,' said Dora passionately, her cheeks scarlet, and her eyes flashing with anger.

A cold hand seemed to grip at Olive's heart ; she turned sick and faint, and for a moment her brave self-control bade fair to desert her. She could never battle through this sort of thing, it was useless to try any longer, and it was so specially hateful to be always at variance with the others. Then it flashed upon her how necessary it was for the stranger to have every possible care, since if he recovered sufficiently to

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give an account of himself it might mean that he would be able to explain the mystery of his being in possession of her father's canoe, and so she rallied her forces for the effort.

'Dora dear, do please be reasonable,' she pleaded, keeping her voice low and calm, although her heart was beating furiously, and all her pulses seemed throbbing in a wild spasmodic fashion. 'It is not a question of what we like, but what we must do for the sake of dear father. You do not need me to tell you that we are very poor. In fact, we are all but at the end of our resources, or we were; but this news which Bluey has brought gives a hope of help from an unexpected quarter. If we cannot give that poor man all the nourishment and care which he needs, he may die without speaking, and then we may never know what he can tell us about dear father.'

'But you do not surely think that he can tell us anything worth knowing?' cried Dora.

Olive shook her head in a non-committal sort of fashion. 'It is not possible to even make a wild guess at what he can tell us. When he raves, as he does most nights, his delirium always seems to point to his having been searching for someone whom he cannot find. But he never speaks of having been hunting for gold; and every time I listen to him, I am more puzzled than I was before.'

'But, Olive, I thought you believed he was the man who stole your letter, and rushed off to get the gold before your father could reach

the place,' interposed Mrs. Scarth, who had been listening intently.

'So I did, mother, and so I do between whiles,' admitted Olive. 'But if you listen to him when he is delirious, it does not strike you that he is that sort of man at all. He never seems eager for money, or getting of any sort, but he is always trying to find some one named Cyril, and assuring him of Uncle Charlie's forgiveness.'

'I have noticed that,' said Mrs. Scarth; 'in fact, I think that he has a very beautiful nature. He is a gentleman too, poor fellow, and a really cultured man; sometimes he will lie muttering passages from Virgil, and only to-day he recited a really beautiful piece of German poetry.'

'In short, he is a perfect Irish stew of knowledge, a little of everything!' chimed in Dora sarcastically.

But Mrs. Scarth motioned her to be quiet, and turning to her eldest daughter, asked anxiously, 'Then you really think we ought to take this money?'

'Yes, please, dear mother, and we must be very grateful for it,' replied Olive, with a sudden sense of relief, because the battle had not been so long, or so hard, as she had expected to find it.

'But it seems such a great deal for just doing a kindness,' objected Mrs. Scarth, in a yielding tone.

'I expect he will cost twice that amount before he is on his feet again,' rejoined Olive

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briskly; then after a moment of hesitation, she went on, 'it seems most wonderful that the children should have brought the news of this money coming to-day, for probably Jeff Morgan will not bring it until he comes up to-morrow afternoon, and then it would have been too late.'

'What do you mean?' asked Mrs. Scarth in surprise, while Dora, who had been getting supper ready, paused in her work to stare at Olive, and the kettle took that opportunity to boil over, and put the fire out.

'Ezra Pratt is dreadfully upset to-day because the man who was going to take the store of him has backed out of the bargain, and won't have it at any price, because he says that Ezra is taking all the trade with him. That is not quite right, although of course there is something in it, for true to his principles Mr. Pratt is going with the crowd. When he found that he could make no better bargain, he offered to let me have all the stocks on the premises for fifty dollars, cash down, and he gave me until to-morrow morning to think it over. But we have no money to pay cash down, and I was thinking as I came up the hill that everything was against us, and that we were the most unfortunate people in the world, with heavier burdens than anyone else. Then Bluey rushed at me with the news, and it seemed as if God had heard my prayers and had stooped from His high heaven to help us.'

There was a moment of hushed silence as if

one were in church ; then Dora said objectingly, 'But you could not keep a store : you know nothing about trade, and that sort of thing.'

'Oh, yes I do,' laughed Olive, as she stretched her tired limbs in luxurious ease upon the settle, while Dora built up the fire again. 'I have served in the store a great deal while Mr. Pratt has been getting ready for his move to Wernside. In fact I have got what he calls the hang of the business, and so I am sure that I shall do. Indeed I should not be surprised if I became a sort of Whately of this western coast, and supplied everything from mustard to motor cars, and from hair pins to aeroplanes.'

They all laughed at this little sally of wit, and then Mrs. Scarth rose, saying that she must go and see how her patient fared. Gretchen had been sitting with him while he slept, but probably he would be awake by this time.

'You will let us take the money, mother ?' Olive looked wistfully at her mother as she spoke, for what was the use of a way of escape being made for them if they would not take it ?

'Yes, dear, if you say we must. But it is very hard to be so poor that we may not even do a kindness unrewarded,' Mrs. Scarth said, with a fleeting sigh, as she stooped and kissed Olive on her way past the settle.

Dora clattered the plates on the table with an aggrieved air, then piled sticks on the fire until the kettle threatened to repeat its former indiscretion, and finally she burst into impatient speech. 'I can't think how it is that you manage to twist mother and all the rest

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of us round your finger as you do. Before you came in we were both hotly agreeing that no power on earth would ever induce us to touch that money, then in you marched, and in a few sentences you put quite another face upon the matter, and we found ourselves giving way whether we would or no !'

Olive laughed, then said a little wearily, 'The secret lies, I fancy, in the point of view you take ; you look at a thing from one side, and it is quite impossible ; then I come along, and show it to you from another direction, and it looks entirely different, both in cause and effect.'

'Humph ! It does not look any different to me, and I don't feel different about it. I merely have to give way in spite of myself, and very soon I shall have no standpoint of my own, and no rights either,' and Dora banged the plates down more aggressively than ever.

'I am very sorry,' said Olive apologetically ; 'it must be horrid to be thrust aside as you have been, but you must not blame me so much as the poverty which makes it necessary for us to sink everything else in our desire to steer a straight course, and keep our heads above water. There is one thing which troubles me just now, that I have not liked to speak of before, but it will have to be decided soon one way or another. I shall not be able to go back to Redway Falls when the schoolhouse is rebuilt, and Dora, I have been wondering whether you would like to take the post ?'

'Me ?' cried Dora, with dilating eyes, with-

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drawing her head in a great hurry from the bread-cask, to make sure that she had heard aright.

'Yes; the salary is not great, and the school is a poor one, but even a little is better than nothing, when people are needy. I am afraid mother will feel it very badly if you go away, that is why I have said nothing about it before. But it is for you to decide.'

'I should love to go!' exclaimed Dora, in a perfect whirlwind of energy. 'No one can ever guess how fearfully sick I am of this dead-alive place, and the thought of living on here for months and months, has been crushing the youth out of me!' And Dora danced about on the tips of her toes like a fairy sprite, her eyes flashing, and her cheeks glowing with happiness.

Then Bluey came running in to say that Olive was wanted in the sick-room, because Gretchen had poked her head out of the door, and said that the sick man was worse.

Olive went off in a hurry; there was a cold dread at her heart lest the poor fellow should die with no explanation of how he came to be in possession of her father's canoe, and the letter stolen from her at Redway Falls, the loss of which seemed to be the starting point of all their troubles and difficulties during the last few months.

He was moaning and tossing in the torment of his pain, but then he did that for so many hours in every day and night that Olive would not have realized he was worse, had it not been for the blueness of his lips, and the dark

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shadow on his face, which caught her attention the moment she entered the shed.

Mrs. Scarth was using all the remedies she could think of to whip up the flagging vitality. But she looked very anxious, and Olive knew without any telling that the crisis was at hand.

'Jeff Morgan said a mustard plaster at the heart would be a good thing for this,' she whispered, pointing to the man's blue lips as she spoke.

'I know, but we haven't a dust of mustard in the place, and I forgot to tell you when you went down to the store this morning,' Mrs. Scarth replied, in a tone of distress.

'I will run for some,' said Olive, snatching up a hat belonging to Gretchen, which lay on a box near the door; and then she went off at a run, for every moment was precious, and even a short delay might be fatal.

She forgot that she was tired, and badly in need of supper, as she ran down the hill, and along the dusty trail to the store.

Ezra Pratt saw her coming, and put her haste down to an entirely wrong cause. 'So you have come to settle the business up sharp,' he said with a chuckle as she rushed into the store.

'I have come for some mustard, because the poor man is worse,' she panted, subsiding on to a stool to recover her breath, while he turned to lift the mustard down from a high shelf.

'It is the last tin but one in stock,' he said, as he handed it to her. 'But you will soon be able to put matters right when you settle

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down to the business, for you have got a downright good head on your shoulders.'

'Yes, yes, that can be seen to later,' she answered hurriedly, then rushed away, carrying the tin of mustard in her hand.

Gretchen met her as she neared the shed, saying in a low, awed tone, 'Mother thinks it is no use to put a plaster on: she fears that the poor man is dying.'

'He must not die. We must save him somehow!' cried Olive wildly. 'Come and help, Gretchen, for just think, if we let him slip through our fingers now, we may never, never know about father.'

Gretchen shivered, looked as if she were going to cry, but crept into the shed behind Olive, and for the next two hours had employment enough in running hither and thither, fetching and carrying the things which Olive and her mother required, as they fought for the life of the poor man on the bed.

At the end of that time Jeff Morgan arrived, having been fetched by Benny, and dragged up the hill at a pace very much in advance of his inclinations.

His old craving had been too strong for him that evening, and he lurched slightly in his walk when he entered the shed, his speech was thick, and his manner coarser than it would have been but for the partial intoxication.

'Nothing to be done, the man is dying, let him go!' he said, when he had stooped over the bed, listening to the fluttering breath of the sufferer.

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'No, no, he must not die!' cried Olive sharply. 'We must keep him alive somehow, and you must help us, Mr. Morgan. He was worse than this two hours ago. I am sure that we can pull him round if we try hard enough.'

'An awful lot of work, and perhaps he isn't worth it. If he lives he will be as helpless as a baby for weeks to come, while the chances are that you will never get paid for your trouble,' objected Jeff, with a maudlin shake of the head. But he was getting better; the pace at which Benny had brought him up the hill had done him good, and now the sight of the sick man's plight was rousing in him all the instinct of helpfulness which had come to him as a part of his medical training. Although he grumbled and said that it was of no use to try any more, he was all the same testing his chances of success, listening to the heart of the patient, and feeling for the faintly fluttering pulse, which seemed to stop and go on, then stop again.

'You must save him, you must!' cried Olive, with a little impatient stamp at what she deemed his callous slowness. 'We do not mind how much trouble he gives us, only we must know how it was that he came to get hold of father's canoe—we must know it!'

Jeff gave a low whistle, then asked abruptly, 'Who put that mustard plaster on?'

'I did. You said that it was the best thing for an emergency,' Olive replied, with a shade of defiance in her tone. She had a creeping

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horror of Jeff under the influence of strong drink. But there was no other help available, and the need was so urgent that she was ready to put up with even worse than this partial intoxication.

'Well, if he lives it will be thanks to you then, and I hope he will be as grateful as he ought to be,' retorted Jeff; then he suddenly cast off the appearance of incompetence, the doctor-manner came uppermost, and for the next hour he issued sharp orders which the others worked hard to obey, even Dora being pressed into service when Mrs. Scarth became too worn out to do any more.

It was a night they would none of them ever forget, and it wanted only one hour to dawning, when Jeff told them curtly that they had all better go into the house and get a sleep, for the man was going to live, and would require more care than a week-old baby.

He was quite sober now, haggard and worn with the struggle of the night, but with the light of successful conflict in his eyes, which, alas! the mode of his ordinary life rarely induced to shine there.

Olive brought him a cup of strong coffee before she went to lie down, and her face was eloquent with the thanks her lips had no power to express.

Jeff took the cup with a grunt of satisfaction, swallowed two mouthfuls in silence, then broke into speech. 'Don't look like that; you make me feel as if you thought I had done you a kindness, instead of which perhaps it is

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the very cruellest thing that could happen to you. Before the week is out you may be wishing that I had let him die."

'Never that!' exclaimed Olive, in a low fervent tone. 'From our hearts we are grateful to you, Mr. Morgan, and feel that you have given us our chance of happiness by saving the poor man.'

'It was you that saved him,' persisted Jeff. 'He would have been dead before I got here if you had not clapped that mustard plaster on. Now go and get some sleep, for you have earned it.'

And Olive gladly did as she was told.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

Taking the Plunge

THE morning was half gone when Olive went down to the store. It is probable that she would not have gone at all that day, only her decision had to be taken, and she knew that Mrs. Pratt and the babies were to start for Wernside early in the next day, so there were preparations of all sorts to be made for the journey.

'Well, are you going to take it?' demanded Ezra Pratt, with unconcealed anxiety, when she walked into the store.

'Yes,' she answered cheerfully, 'but I could not have done it if it had not been for the kindness of the miners in making a collection for the poor sick man whom we are taking care of.'

'Still alive, is he?' asked Ezra, sticking his head on one side, with an air of surprised disapproval.

'We think him decidedly better this morning, and Jeff Morgan feels sure that he will pull through now,' Olive replied, her face radiant with happiness.

'I should have said that it would have been a long sight better for you all if he had died; just think what a nuisance he will be to nurse,'

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grumbled Ezra, who was not feeling very amiable.

' Oh, we do not mind the trouble. We are only too thankful that he is going to get better; you cannot think how anxious we were about him last night,' said Olive. Then producing a canvas bag from the satchel in which she carried her working apron, she humped it down in front of the storekeeper, saying calmly, ' There is the money. You said fifty dollars, cash down, you know.'

He looked at her for a moment as if he wanted to say something, then shook his head and fell to counting the money, frowning heavily all the while, and finally screwing his mouth up to a whistle when it was done.

' Is there something wrong ? ' she asked nervously.

' No ; but there would have been if that patient of yours had not been took sicker last night, I reckon,' he said gruffly, lifting his head and looking her straight in the face. ' Do you know that you came precious near losing the lot of this money last night ? '

' How ? ' she asked, turning white, for such a loss would have been disaster indeed.

Ezra coughed, cleared his throat, and looked as if even now he could not make up his mind about telling her; then he burst out with a jerk, ' Sol Fry and Slippy Jim had got a bet on with Roland Herne that they would win every cent piece of that money from Jeff Morgan at cards last night. Sol doctored the liquor a bit, for it is expensive trying to make Jeff

drunk on ordinary stuff : he can take such a lot without turning giddy. They had got him in that back room at Sol's, and everything was fixed up as neat as wax. Jeff had taken a swallow or two of drink, and was getting downright mooney, when in dashes that little sprig of a brother of yours, yelling out for Mr. Jeff Morgan at the very top of his voice. Sol went out to try and quiet the youngster by telling him that Jeff wasn't there. But he was too late, for when the door was opened, Benny caught sight of Jeff sitting at the table, and in he dashed, nearly knocking old Sol over. Then he got hold of Jeff, and to all accounts he did not leave go of him until he'd got him right up the hill to your house.'

Olive turned from white to red, and then from red to white again. 'Are you sure it is true ?' she said.

'Certain,' replied Ezra. 'It was Roland Herne that told me. He came in this morning chuckling so that he could hardly stand because your Benny had saved him his bet. And he said that if so be the sick stranger died, he would make the coffin for nothing out of sheer gratitude to him for being took bad so opportune.'

'That is truly generous of Mr. Herne, but I am hoping our patient is going to get better, when it is new clothes he is more likely to want than a coffin,' Olive said crisply. 'And now if you will give me a receipt for that money, Mr. Pratt, I will go and help Mrs. Pratt get packed up.'

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'No, miss, no,' objected Ezra solemnly. 'Tis your show now, and you have got to run it. I pocket what is in the till at this moment, and I walk out, don't you see. Every cent what comes in now belongs to you, and I hope you'll do a good trade. Stocks is low, of course, but you can get what you want on credit, for I dropped a line to the wholesale place last night to tell 'em they might trust you to any figure.'

Olive flushed rosy red. 'So you were quite sure that I should take it?' she asked with a laugh.

'Quite sure,' he chuckled. 'In fact, I don't mind owing up to it, I'd made up my determination to lend you the money myself, only then you would have had to pay interest on it, which now you won't.'

Ezra swept a little pile of money out of the till, tied it up in a greasy old pocket handkerchief, which he thrust into his pocket, and then touching his cap, departed to the help of Mrs. Pratt, who seemed to be having a rough time of it, as all three babies were crying to the full extent of their power.

Left alone, Olive turned round and round in the dirty, untidy store, with its medley of homely and strong-smelling merchandise, and a delightful thrill of possession went all through her. It was hers, every bit of it—beans, bacon, blisters, and blankets; and every cent the goods fetched would be hers to use for the dear folks at home.

'Fancy being proud of a mean, dirty little

place like this ! ' she said to herself with a laugh, which ended in a sob. ' I really think that I must be a changeling, and not a Yorkshire Scarth at all ! How dreadfully ashamed of me dear father's grand people would be. It is really lucky that none of them care to remember our existence.'

The first customer appeared at this moment, a slatternly woman who kept Sol Fry's house, and who wanted vinegar.

' We have only a little, as our stocks are so low, owing to change of management, but we shall be able to do better for you next week,' Olive said cheerfully, as she reflected on what Ezra Pratt had said about her credit.

' I only want a little, and it isn't often that we buy vinegar by itself, as we get our pickles ready done,' said the woman; ' but there was fighting at our place last night, and Slippy Jim pummelled poor old Sol nearly to a jelly; the old man is black and blue from his head downwards, so I thought I'd best get some vinegar to put on the bruises.'

Olive nodded, but expressed no sorrow, or even concern, at the evil fate which had overtaken the old man. It was simply a case of his having been hoist with his own petard, and she was not going even to pretend that she was sorry for him.

Sol Fry professed to be a smith: that is he shod any horses which needed it, looked after sledge-runners, mended miners' tools or sold them new ones at perfectly ruinous prices; but he made his money chiefly by supplying bad

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whisky at exorbitant cost to whoever would buy it, and his house, which stood at the Point, was the plague spot of Orsay.

The next customer came for beans, and then Olive discovered that stocks were indeed so very low that she would hardly hold out until next mail day, and the waiting for delivery subsequent on sending the orders.

She was hard at work, making a rough list of what she must have, when Ezra with the baby tucked under his arm came marching into the store, to tell her that he had ordered a batch of such things as were most needful, and that they would probably be delivered during the next week.

Then he solemnly bought a stick of molasses candy for luck, so he told her, and said that he was going to take a holiday for once.

'It's the worst of storekeeping, that you sort of grow to a place, like mistletoe in an apple tree, and you never get any further,' he said, shaking the baby gently to and fro, to stop it whimpering for the candy. 'But I'm going to borrow your store-truck and take the youngsters for an airing this afternoon, if you have no objection.'

'I shall be delighted for you to have it,' Olive replied laughing, then reminded him of the day when she had borrowed that same truck without any ceremony of leave-asking.

'Ah, I reckon you drawed a good-sized bundle of trouble up the hill to your house that day,' he said, shaking his head in a gloomy fashion; 'but I expect you will come out

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of it all right, and if you don't, you'd ought to.'

'Oh, we shall come out right,' Olive responded; and then when Ezra and the baby had gone, she worked away again until Bluey and Benny came rushing in with the news that school had broken up for vacation, two days before the proper time, because the teacher wanted to travel home by the boat, which came up to the Point at noon.

'That is very convenient, because you will both be able to help me in the store,' said Olive, feeling very much relieved, because the assistance of the children would enable her to leave Gretchen at home for a few days, where she would be badly needed, until the stranger got a little better.

It was fearfully difficult work to keep awake all that afternoon, when the store was empty, and a swarm of black flies hovered up and down, with a drowsy droning sound, above the yellow muslin which covered the sugar-barrels. Olive was worn out with the strain and anxiety of the previous night, and she only woke up effectually, when above five o'clock Jeff Morgan sauntered in, looking more haggard than ever. He said that he would be glad to sit up with the sick man that night, so that the rest of them could get a good sleep.

'But that is hardly fair to you, Mr. Morgan, because you were up all last night,' objected Olive.

'I had some rest this morning, as much as I want,' he said gruffly. 'And I owe you all

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something in the way of gratitude for sending for me as you did last night. It fairly makes me perspire when I think of what might have happened if you had not wanted me so bad, and sent that shaver to fetch me. But there, I should have put a bullet through my head this morning, if I had woke up to find that money gone.'

Olive shuddered, then she said urgently, 'Don't have anything more to do with that lot, Mr. Morgan, don't. They only mean mischief by you, and you are worth better treatment than that.'

'I've had a little more to do with them today, Miss Scarth, and that I think is about the end, unless they should happen to kick at their medicine, and want some more,' he said grimly.

'What do you mean?' she asked fearfully, for there was that in his appearance which suggested reprisals, and betokened no good to the men who had tricked him by drugging his drink.

'I mean that I have been and given Sol Fry and Slippy Jim the biggest horse-whipping that they have enjoyed this long time past, and if they want any more I shan't fail them, you may trust me for that!' he said grimly, and his eyes had a fierce gleam of anger such as she had never seen in them before.

Olive looked genuinely distressed. Trouble must follow, she knew, for neither Sol Fry nor Slippy Jim would be likely to sit meekly down under such treatment; and in the sparsely

policed district of the Stikine, men usually settled their differences by shooting each other with revolvers, and it was the quickest man who scored.

'Why must you do things like that?' she burst out hotly. 'If you had never consented to sit drinking and gambling in Sol Fry's house, it would have been impossible for him to have given you the stuff which made you queer, so that it is really you who were to blame all through, and you needed horse-whipping quite as much as the other two.'

Jeff Morgan screwed up his face as if he were about to burst into angry speech; then thinking better of it, he answered with a laugh, 'Well, I will take a whipping from anyone who is strong enough to give it to me, but if that person can't be found, I'll just have to go without it, that is all. So you are going to turn storekeeper, Miss Scarth?'

'Yes, I have taken the plunge to-day,' she answered brightly, 'and the first thing I sold was vinegar for the bruises of Sol Fry. The woman said that he and Slippy Jim had been fighting.'

Jeff Morgan laughed, then said carelessly, 'They may have had a bout among themselves afterwards, but I had first innings, and a good innings too. Well, you'll tell your mother that I shall be along about eight o'clock to-night. She is a first-rate nurse, the very best the poor fellow could have; but there are limits to her strength, so we must help her out where we can,' he said; then with a motion of

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his hand to his hat, he turned and went out of the store.

Olive marvelled when he had gone at the admixture of good and evil in the man. He was clever enough to have risen high in his profession, but he was weak enough to let himself be dragged down by associates like Sol Fry and Slippy Jim, until his honour and his honesty were alike imperilled.

'Oh, the pity of it!' she murmured, 'and just to think what he might have been!'

Bluey and Benny proved good helpers, but the day was a long one, and Olive was thoroughly tired out when shutting-up time came. She had sent the children home to bed, and was just locking up the place for the night, when Ezra Pratt sauntered in, looking very much at ease.

'How is trade?' he asked, yet seeming only to have uttered the query out of a desire to appear civil, for he did not wait to be answered, but moved alertly across the store to inspect the bolts which Olive had shot.

'Pretty good, I think,' she replied, 'only of course there won't be many people to buy when everyone has gone that is on the move. I heard to-day that the Shindlers are going.'

'Yes, but not far,' he answered. 'They are going to homestead a section of land on the Dease Water trail—the Tayu trail, a good many people call it, but it all means about the same thing. About four miles out they will be, and you can still keep the custom if you are willing to deliver goods at their place. They will have



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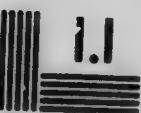
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to live in a wagon, or a tent, until they can get a shack built, and they will have to make haste if they want to have a sound roof over their heads before winter drops upon them.'

'Oh, I shall not lose their custom, if by any means I can keep it,' laughed Olive, and then she exclaimed at Ezra's caution, as he rolled a flour-barrel against the door for greater security. 'What is it you are afraid of, Mr. Pratt? Burglars, or do you fear the bolts are not sound?'

'It is a bit of both,' he answered gravely, 'and I wish that you had a man of some sort to protect you, for there appears to be a deal of scum left in Orsay, now that the tide of prosperity has ebbed out.'

'What do you mean?' she asked, looking at him with dilating eyes, while a cold shiver of dread crept over her, a fear of she knew not what.

'They are saying down at Sol Fry's place that it is easy to rob a woman, and so folks will be getting their groceries for nothing the next few days. But I didn't see the sense in their starting on doing it to-night, so I thought we'd better make the place a little extra secure.'

'Just so. That is a very good idea of yours, Mr. Pratt. And after to-night I shall have to make arrangements for my own protection,' she said, a sudden wave of courage rushing into her heart as she realized what it was that she had to be afraid of. It was only the unknown which really had the power to terrify her.

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'Ah, I thought you'd take it right!' he said, drawing a long breath of relief, and then he put out the evil-smelling lamp which hung behind the counter, and escorted her across the kitchen to the outer door, where Mrs. Pratt was taking the air after her toilsome day of packing.

'I'm downright sorry to leave Orsay, just because of you,' the little woman said, in an outburst of genuine affection and admiration as she held Olive's hand at parting. 'You have been a real good friend to me, and I'm more grateful than I've got words to say.'

'That is very nice of you, and I hope you will not get overworked,' Olive replied.

'Oh, but I shall,' and the little woman sighed windily. 'My sort always do. Then by the time that Ezra has made enough to retire, and live independent, I shall be too tired to enjoy it. Most likely I shall sink into an early grave, and he will have to find another wife to console him.'

'Not a bit of it!' laughed Olive. 'You will begin to grow young again then, and will probably live to be ninety. But I must hurry home, or my mother will be wondering if I am lost.'

Olive walked up the hill with a springy lightness of step and an erect carriage which no amount of weariness or anxiety could daunt.

It was very worrying to her that she must performe leave the care of the sick man to her mother and sisters. But there was no help for it. She had to be the bread-winner now, and it was not possible for her to do everything.

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'There was a revolver in the canoe that day it came down the creek. I will ask Dora for it, or at least where it was put, and then I will rout it out, and wear it in the store for a few days. Even a Stikine rough will respect an argument of that sort which can be tipped with leaden bullets,' she said, with a laugh at her own small wit, as she swung along through the soft gloom of the twilight, until she reached the forest of scaffold poles, where the hotel had been begun.

Somehow she always hated passing that place. Of course there was nothing to be afraid of really, she told herself; it was only that the deserted work got upon her nerves.

It was not quite dark yet, but the brooding twilight of the northern latitudes was rendering everything indistinct and difficult of recognition. Then she saw a woman moving on in front of her. It must be a woman because of her draperies. Instantly Olive's courage returned, and she went forward at a brisker pace, tightly gripping the bag which contained the day's takings.

She could hear the woman's steps upon the road, but her own were inaudible, for she was walking on the grass. She was just going to call out to the woman in front of her, thinking that it might be some neighbour who was coming up the hill to inquire after the patient, when to her horror she saw a dark figure come gliding out from the forest of scaffold poles, and springing towards the woman, grip her roughly by the arm.

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There was a wild shriek of terror from the woman, and with a reassuring cry Olive sprang forward to her assistance.

But the woman had not heard, or did not understand that help was at hand, and she just filled the quiet night with her screams of fright, struggling fiercely in the grip of the man who held her, and who appeared to be trying to wrest something from her grasp.

'You shan't have it, no, you shan't!' she shrieked, and her assailant lifted his fist as if to knock her down.

But the blow was never struck. For at that moment, with a series of springing leaps, Olive reached the spot, and landing the ruffian a tremendous blow on the side of the head with her bag of money, she had the satisfaction of bowling him over like a ninepin.

'There, there, it will be all right!' she exclaimed soothingly, as she cast herself on the prostrate figure, to hold him down, while the woman still rent the air with her screams 'He cannot hurt you now, for I have got him fast.'

'Why, Miss Scarth, it 's you!' gasped the woman, with instant relief in her tones, 'and I declare that I thought it was another murdering villain. I never was so scared in my life. Here, I'll help you hold him, for he ain't going to escape to frighten someone else. I'll make him pay for this, as sure as my name is Priscilla Shindler, the great hulking scoundrel!'

'I believe he is stunned,' said Olive, peering at the man she had knocked down. Then she

cried out in alarm, 'Oh, Mrs. Shindler, what shall I do if I have killed him ?

' You needn't do nothing, my dear, except be thankful that the world is rid of a bad bit of rubbish. He would have killed me to a certainty, if you had not come along to help me. So you've saved my life. And here come your folks pelting down the hill, to see what is the matter. I guess they thought it was you that screamed, though I doubt whether you would have been able to make as much noise as I did. Ah, is that your game, my fine fellow ? Not if I know it ! ' said Mrs. Shindler, when the man who had lain as if dead suddenly galvanized into life, and sprang up to get away.

But she sprang upon him, pounding, punching, and kneading with her hard, bony fists, until he was glad to lie back on the ground, and howl for mercy.

' Why, I declare if it isn't Slippy Jim ! ' she exclaimed, in great disgust, ' and he would have died last winter when he was so ill if I hadn't nursed him. Beautiful gratitude, I call it, to set on me at night in this fashion ! '

' It wasn't you I meant, Mother Shindler,' gasped the fellow, whose breath was nearly punched out of him by those vigorous fists. ' I —I thought you were Miss Scarth, and I wanted the money she had got from the store.'

Mrs. Shindler gave a mocking laugh. ' Well, and you got it too, in that spanking blow on the side of your head that bowled you over so neatly. The very finest use I ever saw money put to, that it was. Now here comes Jeff

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Morgan, and when he has had a look at your ugly face, we'll let you out on bail, and I advise you to get clear away before we set the police on to you, unless you want to be sent to prison for robbery with violence.'

Dora and Gretchen had come rushing down the hill with Jeff Morgan, to see what all the screaming was about.

Directly they spoke, Olive knew that they had been crying, and in a breathless voice she asked, 'What is the matter? Surely, surely the poor man has not died? Bluey said that he was comfortably asleep at tea-time.'

'It is not him,' burst out Gretchen, 'I wish it were. I wish that anything had happened to him before he came here to plague us, the horrid, horrid man, for we have had nothing but trouble ever since he came. And—and this is the very worst of all.'

'What do you mean?' cried Olive, thoroughly startled. 'Dora, Dora, can't you speak; what is it that has gone wrong?'

Dora burst into choking sobs, and for a moment could not say anything; then she gasped in an incoherent fashion, 'He woke up an hour ago quite conscious, and he told us—I mean he said—oh, Olive, he said that poor, dear, darling father is dead!'

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

The Family Affliction

FOR a moment the solid earth seemed to swing round with Olive. She was conscious that Gretchen's arms were round her, that Gretchen's tears were wet on her cheek, while Dora was holding her hands and sobbing violently.

But it was all a black gulf in front of her, and she would have fallen into it, a blessed and merciful unconsciousness, only the thought of her mother pulled her back. It was no time for her to swoon, and be a nuisance; she must be strong and brave, for the sake of the others who depended on her. So struggling, and struggling, she fought off the horrible giddiness, and the sick faintness which nearly mastered her.

'I must go to mother, I must go at once,' she said breathlessly, knowing that her only chance of not breaking down altogether lay in not stopping long enough for her feelings to get the better of her.

'News of your pa, is there, and bad news?' broke in Mrs. Shindler sympathetically. 'Ah, poor things, you poor things!'

The pity of the simple kindly woman made Dora and Gretchen break into fresh grieving,

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but it braced Olive's courage into calmer endurance.

'I must go to mother,' she said, and gripping at Gretchen's arm for support, she passed on up the hill, with Dora trailing behind, while Jeff Morgan and Mrs. Shindler gave Slippy Jim their candid opinion of his character and doings in blunt unvarnished language.

'Where is mother? Is she in the shed?' asked Olive, as they neared the house door.

'No, she has gone into the house. Jeff Morgan is taking care of Mr. Rawson,' Gretchen answered.

'Whom did you say?' queried Olive quickly, too bewildered to understand that this was the sick man's name, which he must have told them when he came back to consciousness again.

'Mr. Rawson is the sick man, you know,' explained Gretchen. 'His name is Anthony Rawson, so he told mother, and he was coming from the Klondyke, by way of the Pelly River, and Lake Tayu. But he got wrecked on the lake, his companion was drowned, and he had given himself up for lost when he came upon a canoe floating in a quiet bay of the lake shore.'

'But that is no proof that dear father is dead,' interposed Olive quickly, catching at hope even when there was none, because she could not let herself give way to despair.

Gretchen gulped down a big sob, then said in choking incoherency, 'There was a dead man in the canoe, dead many days he must have been, Mr. Rawson said; and in the pockets there was dear father's watch, the one Uncle Oliver gave

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him, and the little old compass that he always carried.'

'Father's watch? Where has it been then? And why have we not seen it before?' demanded Olive sharply.

'The watch and the compass too were in the washleather bag that was tied round the man's waist,' explained Gretchen. 'Don't you remember that when mother and Jeff Morgan undressed him before his leg was set, they took the belt off his body, and locked it up in a box, tying the key round his neck; but they would not look to see what the bag contained until he was well enough to do it himself. Then today, when he became conscious, the first thing he asked for was the belt, so mother got it for him.'

'Was there money in it too?' asked Olive.

'A little, I believe,' replied Gretchen. 'He wanted mother to have what there was because of her kindness to him. But she told him that the miners had made a collection, and paid her already. Then she caught sight of the watch and the compass, and cried out to know where he had got them from; and it was then that he told her he had found them in the dead man's pockets.'

'And you believe all that?' cried Olive, with ringing scorn in her tone. 'What about that letter which was stolen from me at Redway Falls, and the bit of Amelia Foster's copy-book, how did Mr. Rawson account for being in possession of these things?'

'He did not account for it. I don't believe

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that we even knew the packet was there. But mother will tell you about it, for I was not there, and only heard of it afterwards,' said Gretchen, and then she led Olive into the kitchen, where her mother was sitting in the rocking-chair by the stove.

'Mother, darling, don't believe it! It isn't true, it can't be true!' she cried, stepping forward, and putting her arms round the slight figure which rose up to meet her.

'Oh, Olive, if only I could disbelieve it!' sobbed Mrs. Scarth. 'But there seems no possible chance of that. I think that I could have borne it better if your father had been taken ill and died here in his bed. It is the thought of his lonely ending out there on the lake shore which is so dreadful to me.'

'Dear mother, the dead who die in the Lord are never alone in their passing,' Olive answered, quoting unconsciously from Mrs. Baldwin of Redway Falls, who had often said those very words in her hearing.

For a few minutes Mrs. Scarth sobbed in silence, then rousing herself, she said with almost feverish energy: 'I knew that you would comfort me, Olive; you always do, and I can lean upon you. The other girls are young, poor things, and they are rather helpless like me. But you are different, and you will have to take care of us all now that your father is dead.'

'Oh, hush, mother!' Olive cried imploringly, 'I can't believe it yet, and I won't. I will have a talk with this Mr. Rawson by-and-

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by, when he wakes up again, and perhaps he will tell me a different story. I shall ask him how he came to have that letter of mine in his possession. Perhaps when he discovers how much we know he will be induced to tell the truth about it.'

Mrs. Scarth shuddered, then she said earnestly, 'I am quite sure that he was telling the truth, Olive, and I am certain that he is a good man. Besides, he has no idea that I am your father's wife. I mean he did not know that the finding of the canoe with the dead body in it meant anything to us.'

'Dear mother, you are so gentle and sweet that it is easy to impose upon you. But, I—oh, I am very different!' exclaimed Olive, drawing herself up, with a hard unmirthful laugh.

'Olive, darling, don't let your sorrows make you bitter and uncharitable, or they will miss their purpose, and do you more harm than good,' Mrs. Scarth said softly, with one of those rare flashes of wisdom which seemed like inspiration; and she clung to her eldest daughter with that confidence in the stronger character which roused all that was best and noblest in the girl's nature. She would not fail her mother whatever might come. And she would treat that sick man decently, if she could. But she would not, oh, she would not believe that her father was dead!

Then she coaxed her mother to go and lie down on the bed, soothing and comforting her with gentle touches and loving words,

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until, worn out in body and mind, Mrs. Scarth sank into deep and dreamless slumber.

Bluey and Benny were also fast asleep. But they had gone to bed in happy unconsciousness of the sadness which had dropped upon the home, and Olive was glad to think that they would be spared the sorrow for a few hours longer.

When she went back to the kitchen, she found that Dora and Gretchen had come in, and were sitting with their arms on the table in attitudes of extreme dejection and woe.

For a moment an almost irresistible desire to give way also took possession of her. Then she remembered what her mother had said, about their all hanging upon her, and so the longing for breakdown had to be thrust aside.

'It is of no use to sit looking like that,' she said briskly. 'I don't believe that father is dead; I don't mean to believe it just yet awhile. But even if we knew it for absolute certainty we should still have to be up and doing, because we have mother and the children to provide for.'

'You may find it easy to be up and doing, as you call it, but I am simply crushed,' replied Dora in a spiritless fashion, and there was so much suffering in her face that in very pity Olive let her alone, and turned to Gretchen. 'Has Mr. Morgan everything that he will want for the night?' she asked.

'I think so,' said Gretchen; 'I have taken him in milk, broth, and barley water for Mr. Rawson, and the things for his own supper.'

Olive nodded, then dismissing the sick man and his affairs from her mind for a few moments, she dropped into her mother's rocking-chair, and proceeded to talk business.

'I want you both to help me with your advice,' she began, and some of the anxiety of her mind crept into her tone in spite of herself. 'I am going to make the store pay, of that I have no doubt, but I cannot run the risk of to-night's unpleasantness very often. The next time an attempt is made to rob me, it may be more successful than Slippy Jim's efforts this evening.'

'It is horribly unsafe to go wandering about with bags of money, alone, in a place like this,' Dora said in a caustic tone.

'I could come for you every evening—I should love to do it,' Gretchen suggested, though as she was growing so fast, most nights found her completely worn out.

'Even that would not do except as a temporary arrangement, I am afraid,' said Olive. 'And I am wondering which would be best for us, to go and live at the store, or to move the store up here?'

'Either would be horrid!' jerked out Dora, who had a soul above trade, and could not be reconciled to any connexion with it.

'But we could not all live, and sleep, and eat in one room as the Pratts did, or rather do,' objected Gretchen, with a grimace.

'No, indeed,' said Olive quickly, 'that is why I think that it will be best to have the store up here; but as Mr. Rawson is in posses-

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sion of the shed, the question is, where can we have the store, don't you see ?'

'There is only the barn,' replied Gretchen.
'For we could not spare this room.'

'The barn, of course ! Why, it is the very place !' exclaimed Olive. 'And just fancy, I never even thought of it ! Moolie, the fowls, and the two pigs can go to live at the store when the cold weather comes, and the barn will make a most beautiful emporium for useful and fancy goods; while I shall be near enough for my affectionate family to protect me from the fell designs of evildoers, like Slippy Jim.'

'How soon can we make the move ?' asked Gretchen, roused to eager interest, as Olive meant that she should be.

'To-morrow, you and the children can get the barn clear of everything, and sweep it out. Then the next day we will bring up the store things, bag and baggage. Luckily, as stocks are so low, it will not be a difficult task. Oh, but what a relief it will be, not to have to face the winter down at that place, so far away from you all !'

'We can't do it this week, it is not to be thought of !' broke in Dora in a shocked tone.

'Why not ?' asked Olive in surprise.

'Because it would seem almost like disrespect to father's memory, to be stirring about in such an active fashion just after we have received news of his death. Besides, there is our mourning to make; we must do that ourselves, I suppose, as we can't afford to put it

out, though I hate sewing, and home-made things always fit so badly, and never by any chance look smart.'

'We must not wear mourning—yet,' said Olive, with so much brisk decision that Gretchen caught her breath in a gasp; but Dora looked mutinous, and asked shortly, 'Why not, pray?'

'Because, in the first place, we have only circumstantial evidence that he is dead, and it is not honouring to his memory to believe it too soon,' Olive said, weighing her words with the utmost care; 'and in the second place, we cannot afford to go into mourning.'

Dora jumped up with a bounce. 'No sacrifice ought to be too great to honour our father's memory,' she burst out hotly, her will, as always, in hot revolt at Olive's common sense.

'We honour his memory best by taking care of mother and the two 'little ones,' Olive answered quietly. 'But go to bed, Dora dear, and you will find that things look much easier in the morning. Gretchen is very tired too, and will have a bad headache to-morrow if she does not get to sleep soon.'

'Are you not coming too?' asked Gretchen, with a wide-reaching yawn.

'In a few minutes, but I must go and say good-night to Mr. Morgan. I have not even thanked him yet for hurrying to my rescue a while ago,' she answered.

Dora stood up, turning a white miserable face towards her, and stretching out imploring hands. 'Olive, Olive, help me to be as brave as

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you are ! Oh, I do hate the shadows so ; why can't we be happy always ?

' It would not be good for us, I suppose,' replied Olive, and now there was a note of dreariness in her tone, despite her efforts to keep it out. Then giving Dora a warm but silent hug, she went out of the door, and stepped along the path to the shed.

Jeff Morgan was leaning against the door-frame, staring moodily out at the night, but he jerked his head round as Olive approached. ' It is time that you were in bed; I don't want anything,' he said, his voice sounding harsh because of the restraint he had put upon himself.

' I am afraid that I did not come to see if you wanted anything,' Olive said, with rather a wan smile. ' Gretchen assured me that she had brought all that you would need. But I want to know about this Mr. Rawson; were you here when he told mother about finding the dead man in father's canoe ? '

' No, he was asleep when I got here, and the women were all crying,' Jeff answered with an air of mild toleration, which he accompanied by a covert glance of admiration at Olive, because she was not crying also.

' Is he asleep now ? ' asked Olive, looking as if she would like to pass the man, whose long length filled up the doorway.

' Yes, what do you want of him ? ' asked Jeff, yet making no attempt to move.

' I want—I want to ask him how he came to have in his possession that letter which was stolen from me at Redway Falls,' she said,

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her voice quivering and breaking from the intensity of the feeling which lay behind.

' You can't ask him to-night. I don't expect he will have another sane spell before daylight, and if he did it would be cruel to bother him. Go and get to sleep yourself; you'll feel better about it to-morrow morning,' he said in gruff kindness.

' I will not speak to him, not even if he is awake, if you do not think it wise. But please let me come in and look at him, Mr. Morgan; there is something that I want to remember,' she pleaded, looking so wistful that Jeff was constrained against his better judgment to give way to her.

' As you will,' he said, drawing aside to let her pass; but he followed her in, and stood close beside her when she bent over the sick man, who appeared to be lying in a quiet sleep.

' It is, I am sure that it is he ! ' she exclaimed, a vivid red flushing her cheeks for a moment, then leaving her whiter than before.

' What do you mean ? ' asked Jeff. So many emotions were contending for the mastery in Olive's face, that he could not be sure whether she was most sorry or most glad to have her suspicions verified.

Olive walked back to the doorway for fear of disturbing the light sleep of the invalid, and she stood leaning against the doorpost, pressing her hand tightly upon her throbbing heart, while she strove for the power to speak calmly.

Jeff followed her, and after a moment

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repeated his question in a different form. 'Who is he ?'

'It is the man who came to save me in the flooded school-house at Redway Falls,' she answered—'the man who saved my life at the risk of his own. He had a handkerchief bound about his face then, and I was so frightened that I did not seem to remember anything clearly. But I am sure that I am not mistaken.'

'Well ?' Jeff's tone was harsh, and he moved slightly, the better to see the face of the girl.

She gave a little choked gasp, pressed her hands tighter against her throbbing heart, then answered, 'He is, he must be, the man who stole my letter, and the map. For Mrs. Baldwin told me he set off next morning at dawn for Dawson.'

'Dawson isn't the place marked on that map of your father's,' Jeff reminded her.

'I know. But when those men in Ezra's tent—those two who were killed you know—were talking about the man who had stolen the letter and the map, they said that he had given out that he was going to Klondyke, and had set off in a great hurry. Dawson and the Klondyke mean pretty much the same thing, you know, so that it all fits in too completely for there to be any possibility of a mistake,' said Olive in a tone of dreary finality.

Jeff made an impatient gesture, and burst out angrily. 'They say there is no one on earth so merciless as a good woman, and I really think that it is about true, though you

are only a bit of a girl, and should not have been so hard yet awhile. Here lies a man so sick that it is a marvel he has not pegged out already; in all his delirium you have never heard a word from him that would have disgraced the best Sunday school in the Dominion; you recognize him as a stranger who once saved your life at the risk of his own, out of pure humanity, and with nothing to be gained by it; and yet you are willing to believe him a common thief, a low-down cadger and your father's murderer.'

'No, not that, not all that!' cried Olive, thrusting out her hands, as if she would push away these stormy imputations.

'It amounts to that in the end. Why can't you wait to judge the poor chap till he's able to say for himself what's lies and what's truth?'

Olive clenched her fists, striving still for self-control. It was awful to her to think that she had judged this man harshly, and it was a mortification almost too great to bear, that Jeff Morgan should lecture her for uncharitableness. She must say a word in her own defence, only the trouble was that for some minutes the words would not come; then at last she said brokenly, 'I have not judged him. I have only reckoned up the coincidences. And can you wonder that I feel bitter against the man who stole the letter my father sent to me, when you think of all the misery that has resulted from the loss? Of course it was all my fault for taking the letter to school with me, but that does not make it easier for me to

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bear, because I know that all the troubles, or at least nearly all of them, are of my bringing.'

Jeff Morgan's face softened, and his voice took on a more kindly tone, as he said, 'I guess you haven't got much to blame yourself with, and your people would have been pretty hard put to it, without your pluck and common sense to rely upon. But don't think too hard of this poor fellow, for he's a white man. I'd stake my life on it that he is white all through, and I ought to be reckoned a judge, seeing what a lot I know of the other sort.'

'Thank you, Mr. Morgan, and good-night. I hope your patient won't give you much trouble,' Olive said, ending the talk, and moving away so abruptly that Jeff Morgan would have thought that he had offended her beyond hope of forgiveness, if he had not guessed that she had reached the limits of her endurance, and had crept away to break down because she could no longer keep her brave front to the world.

'Poor little girl, she'll feel better and kinder when she has been to sleep,' he said to himself with a shake of the head as he turned back into the shed, moving towards the bed to see how it fared with his patient.

To his surprise the man's eyes were open, and there was no trace of delirium in their questioning gaze.

'Feel better, sonny?' Jeff asked, wondering uneasily how long the stranger had been

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awake, and how much of the talk in the doorway he might have overheard.

'Who is it that is white all through?' demanded Anthony Rawson, ignoring, perhaps not even hearing, the kind inquiry about his well-being.

'Why, yourself, of course,' answered Jeff promptly. 'I've seen too many shady ones not to know a white one when I see him.'

'What was the matter with that girl? And who is she?' demanded the sick man, so brusquely that Jeff felt more uneasy than ever, although he took good care not to show it.

'That was Miss Olive Scarth, the girl who rescued you that day when you got stuck in that bit of rough water up creek. She is about as plucky as you would find a girl, only she has got rather a big load to stagger under just now, and it makes her inclined to be what they call in the States downright pernickety,' Jeff said excusingly. In his own mind he felt nearly certain that the sick man had overheard the talk, and he was anxious to soothe him into having a quiet night if possible.

To his surprise the stranger made no response, but after a few minutes of wakefulness, in which he accepted in silence the nourishment pressed upon him, he dropped into slumber again.

'Well, that beats everything!' muttered Jeff in relieved astonishment, as he gazed down at the sleeping patient. 'The fellow could not have heard what was said, or else he must have a conscience like a week-old baby. To my

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way of thinking he's the sort that dies young,
and the marvel to me is that he has lived so
long.'

But he was mistaken there, for Anthony
Rawson had heard every word of that talk be-
tween Olive and Jeff Morgan.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH

Anthony Rawson's Word

THE little house where the Scarths lived was better provided with outhouses than most of the other abodes in Orsay. Mr. Scarth had still a little money left when he came to settle in the place, and it was characteristic of him to build sheds and other conveniences at once, instead of waiting until success in his new venture justified the expenditure.

But for once this sort of extravagance proved of great value and comfort to the family, who just now had to struggle under so much difficulty. The barn which had cost so much to raise, would make, as Olive said, a really good store, and its greatest advantage lay in its nearness to home.

Early next morning Gretchen and the two youngest children set to work to get the barn turned out, and in readiness for its new use. Even Dora came to lend a hand at the task, for the morning had brought wisdom with it, and she was, for the time at least, intent on being as useful as possible.

They all went about the business in the subdued frame of mind caused by the black tidings of yesterday. In an ordinary way there

would have been much fun and merriment over such an undertaking, especially when Gretchen, in her efforts to haul out a great tub of sifted chalk, collected for some idea of inventing a patent wall-plaster, had the misfortune to tumble into the choking white dust, whence she emerged powdered from top to toe, coughing and half-blinded.

But although Benny remarked that she looked like a snow-man on a Christmas cake, no one even smiled at her plight. Dora and Bluey swept her down with a broom, and then took it in turns to beat her gently with a flat stick, until the worst of the dust was out.

'What shall we do with the chalk; throw it away?' asked Dora listlessly, as she went back to the barn and surveyed the scene of Gretchen's impromptu dust bath.

'No, no,' cried Gretchen hastily. 'Father sifted it last fall and was going to invent his plaster when he had leisure after the snow came, only, you know, the opportunity never seemed to come, and so it did not get done.'

'And now it is of no use,' faltered Dora, with a catch in her breath.

'Don't be too sure of that,' Gretchen put in quickly. 'I might take it in my head to invent something myself one of these days. I have got the feeling that I am going to turn out clever, in spite of my disadvantages, or perhaps because of them. Anyhow, the chalk is going to be saved, although I do not want to fall into it again just yet, for that sort of thing is decidedly unpleasant.'

'We had better drag it into this corner; it will be out of the way here, and if we cover it with planks, it will make a very good counter for cheese and bacon,' said Dora. Then she shrugged her shoulders, exclaiming in a tone of disgust, 'Bah, what a pass for a Scarth to come to! It is just horrid, and I wonder why it is that Olive has no pride, when I have so much.'

'I believe that in a way Olive is prouder than any of us, but it is such a lofty sort of pride, that it lifts her so high up in her thoughts as to make her indifferent to anything people may say about her,' said Gretchen, as she stood on a very shaky old ladder, sweeping the cobwebs down from the roof.

'Well, I wish that I had a little more, or a little less, just whichever is most comfortable,' said Dora, in a tone of discontent; and then she went off to the house to prepare the midday meal, leaving Gretchen to wrestle single-handed with the cobwebs.

That night both Jeff Morgan and Dora were at the store, to walk up the hill with Olive when closing time came; and the three went slowly up past the gaunt framework of the hotel, talking over the doings of the day.

'I had some Indians come in this morning, the first that I have seen since I have been home,' said Olive. 'And oh, they were so funny. Of course I could not understand them, as they had no English, and they could not understand me, but we managed quite nicely, for the man laid down half a dollar,

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and pointed to the things he wanted, then I laid the goods beside the money, and because there was not enough to suit him, he brought out another half-dollar. By the way, I do wonder where they get their money from, as they do not seem ever to work, or even to trade.'

' Begged it, I expect, or stole it,' said Jeff Morgan carelessly; ' and as to their having no English, that I should doubt. If you had attempted to cheat them in any way, I guess that you would have had torrents of abuse poured out upon you in more or less understandable English.'

' I don't think so,' objected Olive, shaking her head, and then her voice grew a little husky as she went on. ' The woman had an empty papoose bag slung on her back, and she seemed so sad, that I just longed to comfort her.'

' Don't think that Indians are ever sad, or joyful either; they are only like animals, they eat, they sleep, they die,' Jeff Morgan replied.

But Dora said impatiently, ' Why waste sympathy on a person who does not need it? And by the way, what did you do to that poor Mr. Rawson last night, Olive? He has been worrying mother all day, asking to see someone, he does not know whom. Gretchen and I had to be paraded before him like a pair of culprits, but neither of us answered to the description of the person wanted, so mother told him that she expected it was you whom he wished to see, and promised that you should go in when you came home.'

A great trembling seized upon Olive then, and if it had been possible she would have run away rather than face the ordeal of an interview with the sick man. But of course this was very foolish. It was of no use to be silly and sentimental, when a great issue like this had to be faced; she must just pluck up her courage and go straight on, doing the very best that she could.

Nevertheless, she grew suddenly out of breath, and had to cling to Dora's arm for support before the top of the hill was reached.

'Poor thing! I expect you feel fagged out,' said Dora sympathetically. 'But never mind; when we get the store moved up here to the barn, I shall be able to help you between the pauses of washing and baking, that is until I go to Redway Falls.'

'I don't think that I am very over-tired, but it has been so hot to-day, and the flies have been awful. Then when darkness came, and the fly trouble grew less acute, it was the mosquitoes that arose in their thousands, and made life a burden,' Olive said nervously, fearful lest Dora should guess at her secret perturbation, and deem her lacking in zeal on her father's behalf.

The silent man walking at her side understood what she had left unsaid, and when the house was reached, and Dora had darted off to see if her mother were still in the shed, he said quietly, 'You won't forget, Miss Scarth, that the poor fellow isn't out of the wood yet? You saved his life when he was stranded on

the rocks; don't imperil it now by incautious words and hasty judgments.'

A sharp retort rose to Olive's lips, but she checked its utterance, and said in quite a meek tone, 'I will be very careful.'

He just nodded and fell into the background, as Dora came running from the shed again, and called out to Olive, 'Mother is not in the shed, but Mr. Rawson is awake, and he asked if you had come, so I told him yes, and that you would come and see him directly.'

'Very well,' Olive replied quietly, and giving Dora the bag with the day's takings to carry into the house, she turned towards the door of the shed, fighting still that stupid desire to run away.

But she was very calm and quiet when she walked into the circle of lamplight beside the bed, and looked down upon the white face of the man lying there.

Then suddenly a great compassion gripped her. Surely a man with a face like that could not be thief and traitor, while certainly, whatever he was, his suffering, helpless condition gave him a claim on her sympathies.

'Do you feel better to-night?' she asked gently.

But he waved the question aside, as if it were of all things unimportant whether he felt better or worse; and stretching out his hands eagerly, he asked, 'What is it that I have done? and why did you say last night that I was at least a low-down thief, if not a murderer?'

'Oh, did you hear all that? I am so very sorry, but I thought you were asleep,' she said, and her voice had a shocked tone.

'It is better that I should hear it, if it has got to be said,' he replied with a touch of grimness in his tone; but his eyes held hers with an insistent questioning in their gloomy depths, and she had no choice save to do as he wished.

'Was it not you who risked your life to save me, when I was in the flooded school-house at Redway Falls?' she asked; and again the old desire to reverence her rescuer swept over her with irresistible force, even though with her lips she was ready to call him hard names, because coincidences fought against him.

'I don't think that I risked more than a wetting,' he answered, with a smile that faded as quickly as it came, and then he went on, 'But why was your identification of me last night only another link in the chain of circumstances which made my guilt a thing as good as proved?'

'I believed that you had stolen a letter of mine, and—and used it,' she stammered, suddenly feeling very much of a culprit, and discovering all at once how much more easy it was to believe evil of this man behind his back than when face to face with him, as he lay helpless on his bed.

To her surprise, his countenance displayed nothing but the most profound amazement; there was not even anger that such an offence should be imputed to him; and then he said

blankly, 'But why should I steal a letter of yours? And where was it to be stolen from? But the very idea is absurd, for I did not even know your name until last night, when the kind somebody who took care of me told me that you were the eldest Miss Scarth.'

Olive turned from white to red, and then from red to white again. Oh, this was dreadful to have accused a man of a wrong behind his back, and ther to find when face to face with him that it was all a mistake, and that the coincidences of which she had spoken so strongly showed gaps which no stretch of probability could bridge.

But she must defend herself, she must, and making a great effort, for every word seemed as if it would choke her, she burst out—'The letter was in my desk in the schoolhouse, but when we came to search for it, we could not find it, and it was never seen again, until the day when your canoe came down creek—I mean my father's canoe, which you came in, and I found the letter again among the packages of sample gold in the canoe.'

Breathlessly she poured her story out, keenly watching the man's face the while for signs of conscious guilt. But he only showed intense bewilderment, and a strained look came into his eyes which warned Olive that she was trying his strength too far, and a swift penitence for her indiscretion came to her.

'Please, please, do not worry about it now,' she faltered, taking his restless hands in her own, and holding them fast, as if she would

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compel him to be quiet, whether he would or no.

'I must worry about it, until I get the thing straightened out,' he answered, with a touch of irritation at his own inability to understand the incoherent story which she had poured into his ears.

Olive was frightened. This was the very thing that Jeff Morgan had warned her against, and at once she realized the harm she was doing, and the necessity of speedily easing his mind.

Her clasp on his hands tightened, and she stooped lower over him in her effort to be impressive. 'I am afraid, Mr. Rawson, that I have made a very big blunder somewhere, and that I have accused you of something you have never done. Will you promise to let it rest there until you are strong enough to hear the whole story, and to tell us all about yourself, and where you have been ?'

'I don't know,' he said feebly. 'When a man is down, he can't be held responsible for not worrying, and my head is not clear now. I don't seem able to think straight.'

'You will be stronger to-morrow, and then things will look easier,' she answered gently. 'Now I must go, for it is getting late, and I have not had my supper. Besides, Mr. Morgan is waiting to come and take care of you.'

But when she attempted to move her hands, he clung fast to them. 'You will come back in the morning, won't you ? Please come in the morning, for my brain is clearer then, and I

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want to understand about what it is you think I have done.'

'I cannot come in the morning, either tomorrow or the next day, because I have a store to look after; but the day after that is Sunday, and then I can come to see you in the morning,' she said, then gently tried to withdraw her hand, but he still held it fast.

'Suppose I slip out of life before Sunday comes, am I to go to my grave dishonoured, because I am so muddled that I cannot understand?' he asked, with the dogged persistence which was one of his strongest characteristics.

'No, no, of course not. Oh, why will you take the matter so seriously, when it is easy to see that I have made a most fearful mistake?' she exclaimed; and now her eyes were full of tears, which Jeff Morgan saw, as he came softly walking into the room, to warn Olive that she had been too long.

'Time's up, Miss Scarth; this sick man ain't made of cast-iron,' he said gruffly, for the sight of her evident distress raised an unaccountable irritation in him.

'Please help me, Mr. Morgan,' she said, turning to him with an imploring air. 'Mr. Rawson unfortunately heard all that I said to you last night, and now when I want to convince him that I may have made a mistake, I cannot do it.'

'Ah, it is one thing to make a hole, and quite another to fill it up again,' said Jeff Morgan, quoting a backwoods proverb with a gloomy air, as he noted the sick man's rising excitement.

'Please, please believe, whatever happens, we would never think anything of you that was not upright and honourable!' cried Olive, making her recantations with a haste and completeness which would have been ludicrous if the occasion had not verged so nearly on the tragic.

Anthony Rawson struggled to raise himself on his pillow, but being too weak, held up his right hand instead, as if he were taking an oath.

'There are two of you here to hear me, and to see,' he said weakly, 'and I have only my word to give you, that I have done you no wrong; a thief I am not, neither have I taken life either directly or indirectly, for the rest I do not understand, but—'

'Oh, quick, Mr. Morgan, he is dying—dying, and it is all my fault!' cried Olive in alarm, as the sick man's head fell back, and he lay gasping and struggling for breath, as if he were indeed passing.

Jeff Morgan elbowed her aside with more haste than politeness, saying gruffly, 'I will see to him, but you had better clear; you seem a bit too exciting for a patient of this sort. But I don't doubt but what he'll find you as good as a tonic of the most topping kind when he is a bit more convalescent.'

Olive swung sharply out of the shed, in a mixed tumult of red-hot anger and self-reproachful penitence, while her cheeks scorched in burning blushes because of the double meaning which might be read into Jeff Morgan's utterance.

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But she carried with her the memory of the sick man's haunting eyes, and the absolute sincerity of his manner. He was telling the truth, she was positive of it; and although this did but deepen the mystery about the letter and everything else, she had no choice but to believe the evidence of her own eyes.

A letter had come from Redway Falls, accepting the offer of Dora in place of Olive, and appointing a day in the following week for the commencement of school. The Education Authorities had stirred quicker than usual, with the result that the managers had been hustled into unwonted activity in the building of the new schoolhouse.

The news caused a great flutter in the family; there was so much talk and discussion about Dora's wardrobe and the necessities of her journey, that Olive's silence and abstraction passed almost without notice.

The next day was one of tremendously hard work, as Olive had all the goods from the store moved up the hill and placed in the barn. She would have waited until Monday for this, but she had a nervous dread of facing the Saturday night's trade down at the store alone. And as the new stocks for the store might arrive any day now, it seemed better to get settled in the new quarters as soon as possible.

By noon everything but the last load had been moved from the cramped little building in which Ezra Pratt had driven such a flourishing trade. Of choice Olive would have been only too thankful to find a tenant for the place,

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but tenants were hard to find in Orsay in this time of slump, and her agreement with the late owner was that she should pay rent for two years, with the option of purchase.

'It will have to be Moolie, the pigs, and the fowls that will live here I suppose, though it will be a miserable business coming so far to milk in times of blizzard,' she said to herself with a sigh, as she looked round, debating ways and means, while she waited for the wagon that was to take the last load of things up the hill.

Then into the almost empty store glided the Indian squaw, who had the empty papoose bag slung at her back.

'Trade, trade, it is tr-rrade,' she said, rolling her r's like a Frenchwoman.

Olive laughed. It was true, then, what Jeff Morgan had said, that these people could find English words when they had any need of them.

'What is it that you want to trade for?' she asked gently, for the squaw had a furtive, frightened look, as if she were afraid of someone coming to stop her purchasing.

'Bacca!' The woman opened her mouth wide, dropping out the word like a child just beginning to talk.

Olive hunted round. Surely there was a box with tobacco in it somewhere among the things which had been left for the last load. Ah, yes, there it was down behind the case containing tinned pine-apple and canned peaches from California.

Lifting the box on to a barrel, she showed

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the squaw the tobacco, asking — ‘What trade?’

‘Trade bacca,’ answered the woman promptly; and swinging the papoose bag round to the front, she dived her hand into it, dragging forth a small bundle from an odd assortment of personal treasures contained therein, and plumping it down on the barrel beside the tobacco.

Olive touched it with unwilling fingers; she had taken an odd liking to the little squaw, who carried an empty cradle swung at her back, and she hated to think that the woman was going to trade some of the dead babe’s belongings to gratify a taste for tobacco; but then she did not know that the empty papoose bag was a sort of hold-all, travelling trunk and market basket combined.

The bundle was wrapped in a dirty fragment of cotton handkerchief, and when she opened it Olive gave a start of astonishment, for before her was a little home-made housewife, of the kind very much in vogue for Christmas and birthday presents in country places. There were compartments for scissors, buttons, needles, and pins, and—yes, there should be inside a little secret pocket for the hoarding of small treasures, such as portraits or letters.

Her fingers trembled as she turned the thing over. She had seen this before, and unless she were much mistaken, it was she herself who had worked the fancy border in pink floss silk, faded now, and dirty, but recognizable all the same. Yes, there was the corner where she had muddled the design, and had been obliged

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to work in some fancy flourishes of her own invention. But for whom had she done it? So many bits of work of this kind had fallen to her share during her time at Redway Falls, for the girls were always wanting to learn new stitches in embroidery and fresh methods of doing fancy work.

Suddenly her fingers discovered the opening of the secret pocket, and at the same moment they encountered something stiff inside. She drew this something out, while the squaw looked on in blank astonishment, for apparently the inner pocket had not been investigated by her, so her trade might be more valuable than it had seemed at first.

The something was a photograph of two children, & miserable snapshot warranted not to flatter. But Olive knew them, and when she turned the picture over, her lips curled in an involuntary smile, as she read—
‘From your affectionate friends Joseph and Amelia Foster.’

‘It was Joe who wrote that, and he never could spell affectionate,’ she said to herself, thinking of the lumpy boy with the fat white face and caroty hair, who was the school-manager’s only son. Amelia was sharp and clever, like her hard-working little mother, but Joe was thick in the head, and as conceited as George Foster himself.

But how had the thing come into the possession of this Indian squaw? And then there came to Olive the remembrance of the pieces from Amelia’s copybook, which she had found

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wrapped round the samples of auriferous earth in her father's canoe.

What did it all mean? What could it mean? And who was it away in the wild lands who had things which in the first place had belonged to the Fosters, her former pupils at far-away Redway Falls?

'Where did you get this from, where?' she panted, holding out the picture in one hand and the case in the other.

'Tr-rrade, mooch trade, bacca!' exclaimed the squaw, holding up her hands in great admiration of the picture, which in her estimation added not a little to the value of her trade. But she either could not or would not understand the questions put to her concerning her possession of the articles.

And just then the wagon for the last load rumbled up to the door.

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH

The Mystery Deepens

THE days which followed on the moving of the store were some of the hardest that the Scarths had ever known. First there was the store to get straight. Then there was the business of getting Dora off to Redway Falls and the tremendous blank caused by her going. While to make matters worse, and to increase the troubles of all concerned, for a whole fortnight Anthony Rawson was so ill that they thought every day must be his last.

He was wildly delirious most of the time, or lying in a state of utter collapse. Mrs. Scarth and Jeff Morgan were nearly worn out with nursing him, and Olive stole as much time as she could from the store to help them when the delirious turns were on, but she fled when he became quieter, for that meant that he would become conscious, though utterly prostrate.

The delirium frightened her badly enough, for the burden of his raving was always the same; he was for ever calling upon her to witness that his honour was unstained, and that he had done her no wrong.

'Oh, mother, mother, it is just dreadful!' she cried one day when Mrs. Scarth came to re-

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lieve her, because a long delirious bout showed signs of wearing down into the usual fit of exhaustion. 'If the poor man dies, I shall feel as if I have killed him, and I cannot help thinking that it would have been far kinder to have left him to die in the bit of rough water, than to have brought him back to suffer like this.'

'You must not talk in such a fashion,' said her mother in gentle reproof. 'While there is life, there is hope; he may live even now, and indeed I think he will, for he has pulled through so much, which shows that he has a good constitution or he could not have stood it all. Only, dear, let it be a warning to you not to make a hasty judgment again. Of course circumstances looked black against him, but I am quite sure that he has never done us any wrong, or your dear father either. There is nothing like delirium for showing up the secrets of a man's heart, and this one is like Nathaniel, in whom there was no guile.'

The face of Olive glowed crimson in the shaded light of the lamp; she had seen deep down into the heart of Anthony Rawson during those wearing spells of delirium, and always the burden of his raving was that she would not believe in him.

No wonder that she always fled at the merest indication of a conscious spell. Over and over again he had murmured to-night, as he lay in the clutch of his fever, that she was the one woman in the world for him, and she would not believe in him.

Poor Olive! Her girlhood was being

wrested from her bit by bit. First there had been the trouble of her father's going, and the struggle to clear off the crushing load of debt. Then had come the worry and apprehension concerning her father's fate, which had worried her so terribly, because she held herself responsible at least indirectly for his hurried start. Now on the top of all these things came the knowledge that Anthony Rawson cared for her.

'It is dreadful, dreadful!' she murmured to herself, as she went back to the house and crept into bed beside Gretchen, who was already fast asleep. But it was long before slumber came to Olive. Over and over again she was repeating to herself the words of the sick man's delirium, then trying with all he might to put away even the memory of them from her. Why should he care about her, a girl whom he had scarcely seen? True he had saved her life, and then she had saved his, but what of that? And she had scarcely seen him since, when he was sufficiently conscious to know her.

'Oh dear, oh dear, what a tangle it is!' she exclaimed, as she tossed and turned, unable to sleep, and thinking ruefully of the morrow, when she would be so tired, and perhaps irritable from want of sleep.

Then presently her mother came in and went to sleep, for Jeff Morgan had taken over the care of the sick man; then the little house was left in unbroken quiet, and Olive drifted into fitful slumber.

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'Olive, Olive, I want you !'

Clear and insistent the voice rang in her ears, and she started up in bed crying out in response, 'Yes, father, I am coming.'

'My dear child, what is the matter ? are you ill ?' called her mother from the next room.

'No, no, I am all right, but father called me,' cried Olive, who was still struggling to throw off her sleepiness ; then she exclaimed, 'Mother, mother, I know it was father who called ; perhaps he has come home, and is waiting at the door !'

Out of bed she tumbled, commencing to throw on her clothes with frantic haste. If her father had come, he must not be kept waiting outside a locked door. It was a royal welcome they would give him, and her heart began to beat in an overwhelming tumult of joyfulness.

'But, Olive, Olive, what are you thinking of ? Don't you remember that your dear father is dead ?' sobbed Mrs. Scarth, coming in from the next room, and shivering from fright and cold.

'Mother, I heard him, I know that he is here ; oh, where are my things ? It is dreadful to keep him waiting !' and struggling into a skirt, Olive flung a shawl round her shoulders and hurried across the kitchen to the outer door.

Gretchen and Bluey were awake by this time, while Benny from his little cupboard of a bedroom on the other side of the kitchen called out to know what all the noise was about.

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' Dear father has come home, and I am going to let him in,' replied Olive, who had not the slightest doubt about it being the voice of her father that she had heard calling to her.

Hastily unlocking the door, she flung it open, then stood appalled, staring into the chill, dense darkness which comes before the dawn. But there was no one there, no sound in the silent night, save the moaning wind sweeping across the hills and the flats of the wilderness land beyond the Stikine valley.

' Father, father, where are you ? ' she cried and her voice had a note of quavering in it.
' Father, father, where are you ? '

Benny came patterning across the kitchen with bare feet, to stand beside her peering into the weird gloom.

' Where is he, Olive ? I can't see him,' queried the small boy, with pained disappointment in his tone, as he broke the hush of the strained listening.

' Olive, Olive, come back to your bed, my dear, you must have been dreaming,' said Mrs Scarth gently, trying to draw poor shivering Olive back from the open door.

But she would not go. ' Mother, I heard him. It was his voice that woke me up,' panted Olive, taking a step outside the door and peering round the corner of the house. ' Perhaps when he found that we were all fast asleep, he went along to the shed, and is talking to Jeff Morgan ; the door is a little bit open, so I will step along and see.'

' You cannot go like that, Olive ! ' cried her

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mother in protest, for she had only slipped her bare feet into a pair of slippers, and her white ankles showed beneath her short skirt.

'I am quite covered by this shawl, mother, and I could not keep father waiting whilst I dressed properly,' she said, catching her breath in a sob; and then she flitted away into the darkness, her feet making a flip-flapping noise on the dry hard ground, as the loose-at-heel slippers slid up and down.

'Go back to bed, girls; you will catch your deaths of cold,' said Mrs. Scarth urgently, as Gretchen and Bluey came crowding to her side.

'It is you who will catch the cold; wrap this blanket round you, dear,' said Gretchen, tucking a big red blanket about her mother, who was only half clad.

'Here comes Olive, she is running. Oh, I say, do you think that she has found father in the shed?' cried Bluey excitedly, dancing about the cold floor on the tips of her toes, by way of warming them.

But before Mrs. Scarth had time to reply, Olive had rushed up to the door, and was crying urgently, 'Oh, mother, come quick, come quick, I believe that Mr. Rawson is dying, and Jeff Morgan is so fast asleep that I cannot wake him!'

'I will come,' said Mrs. Scarth, and clutching at Olive's hand, she hurried with her out into the darkness.

'Gretchen, I'm so frightened, and I don't believe that father has come at all,' sobbed

Bluey, clinging to the bigger sister and sobbing
dismally.

'I was sure that it was father, because Olive
never makes a mistake,' said Benny, in a
aggrieved tone; and then he crept off back to
his bed, because he was afraid that if he stayed
with the others, he would break down and be
just like a girl.

'Oh, Olive, poor man, he is very low down
I—I am afraid that we cannot pull him up,' said
Mrs. Scarth, as she searched in vain to find
pulse in the sick man's limp wrist.

'We must pull him up somehow, mother,
we must. Oh, it is dreadful to let him slip away
like this!' cried Olive; and lifting the sick man's
head, she began to give him drops of nourishing
stimulant from a teaspoon.

At first he did not seem able to swallow it,
then presently there was a feeble gulp, and
after half an hour of anxious tending, the
flutter of the pulse was distinctly felt. When
an hour had passed, he had taken a little warm
beef tea, and had looked up into Mrs. Scarth's
face with a smile, after which he had dropped
into a peaceful sleep.

Olive had slipped into the background
when the sick man looked up into her mother's
face and smiled; but when he fell asleep, she
came round to the other side of the bed, and
whispering urgently, 'I will just run into the
house and dress properly, then come back
and take care of him, until it is time to open
the store for the day.'

Mrs. Scarth nodded, but cast a fearful

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glance at the corner, where Jeff Morgan lay stretched out on two packing-cases, snoring heavily.

'He won't stir for hours, mother dear; I shall be back in ten minutes, and I am not afraid of him,' said Olive, with a thrill of indignation in her tone; then she bounded away in a great hurry to dress properly, so that she might take charge and send her mother to bed.

A curious sense of elation was on her now; she felt equal to everything which was required of her, and in her inmost heart she knew that Anthony Rawson was going to get better. He would have died that night if she had not been roused from sleep by the mysterious call, which she had believed to be her father's voice, bidding her get up and open the door.

'What was it that really woke you, Olive?' asked Gretchen, as Olive came into the house to find the kitchen aglow with firelight; for Gretchen had roused up the embers in the stove, making a cheerful fire in readiness for any emergency, and was sitting in the rocking-chair close beside the stove.

'I don't know,' said Olive, as she brought her everyday garments from the bedroom, and began a hasty robing in the comfortable light and warmth of the fire. 'But I think it must have been Providence which sent me flying off to the shed, to see if father had come; a little longer, and it would have been too late to save the poor man's life.'

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'Oh, that wretched Jeff Morgan!' burst out Gretchen.

'Poor fellow, he will feel so bad when he comes to himself again,' Olive said pitifully.

'And he has watched so many nights that he must be nearly worn out. I expect that was why he gave way to drink again. How I wish that we could help him to help himself, and rise above his temptation.'

Gretchen snorted after her favourite fashion when anything displeased her. She was tired and cross with having lost her night's rest, and was not disposed to regard with charity the weaknesses of any one. Moreover she had been crying her eyes out because of the disappointment about her father. Improbable as it was that he should arrive home in the middle of the night after such a journey she had never once doubted Olive's cry that her father had come home.

Something of this Olive understood, and her voice was caressing and tender when she said, 'Darling, don't let mother see that you have been crying so much when she comes in: we have got to be brave for her sake you know. I am dreadfully sorry that I upset you all. But I am very, very thankful that something did rouse me. It would have been so terrible for Jeff Morgan if poor Mr. Rawson had died last night.'

'I will be as cheerful as possible when mother comes in, trust me,' said Gretchen nodding her head with an air of great determination; and Olive hurried away, certain that she would do her best.

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Then Mrs. Scarth went back to bed, and Olive mounted guard in the shed, where the two men lay, the one brought back from the verge of the grave, the other prostrate in the clutch of his enemy; and the long autumn night wore on to morning.

No words could describe the humiliation of Jeff when he came to his senses, which was not until Bluey and Benny had gone to school. Olive was busy in the store, and even Mrs. Scarth was momentarily absent.

He roused himself up from the hard packing-cases where he had lain all night, and looked about him, trying to understand what had happened. Then suddenly he staggered to his feet, and lurched across to the bed where the sick man lay, an awful fear gripping at his heart.

But Anthony Rawson lay sleeping as peacefully as an infant; an empty cup on the table at the side of the bed suggested recent nourishment, and outside the door he could see Gretchen moving to and fro hanging garments on a clothes line.

The world was all right, it was only himself that was wrong.

Could he face them again, these people who must know how he had failed in his trust? Jeff thought not, and decided to clear at once, before any one encountered him in his humiliation. It was of no use for him to try to keep straight, so the sooner he went to the dogs the better for all concerned. Watching until Gretchen went into the house for a fresh lot of

clothes, he slipped out of the door; then twisting and doubling in and out among bushes and sheds, or anything which was big enough to afford him cover, he got away from any danger of an encounter with Mrs. Scarth or Olive. Then he headed straight for Sol Fry's shack, that being the nearest place where he could buy liquor to drown the remorse that was nearly driving him wild.

But heaven had another chance to give him. Before he reached Sol Fry's shack, two men came hurrying up from the Point in search of him, and simply fell upon him in their desperate need of help. A child had been almost burned to death at a lone place, a mile down the creek; the mother had been also badly burned in trying to save it, and the two were lying unattended, while the man came in search of help.

'I—I am not fit to look after sick folks. I slept on duty last night, and a man might have died, for I was drunk,' blurted out Jeff in the bitterness of his humiliation.

'You come along o' me. I'll see you don't sleep when our Joey needs you to keep awake,' said the poor distressed father, clutching at Jeff, and fairly dragging him along the trail to the Point.

'Yes, you go along, Jeff Morgan, and do your duty slick and straight, like a Britisher,' said the other man, who had merely volunteered to assist his distracted neighbour in his search for help. 'Time enough to go and muddle your wits with Sol Fry's bad liquor.'

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when there ain't no sick and suffering folks to need you. But you are surely too much of a man to let a little child die in tortures of a pain, while you sit and fuddle your brains until you haven't the sense of a brute beast.'

It was the thought that a child needed him which whipped Jeff Morgan up to doing his duty that morning. The desperate case of a man or a woman would not have stirred him from the fit of self-loathing into which his lapse had plunged him. But a child was different; and giving himself a shake, he announced himself ready for what was wanted.

'Come on then; we can be back in twenty minutes, or less if you are lively. Such a pert, knowing little chap as my Joey is, and then for him to be hurt so awful, sort of knocks you into nowhere, as you may say,' gasped the afflicted father, breaking into a sort of dog trot, but keeping a tight clutch on Jeff, as though fearing that he might make a bolt for it even now.

'Steady, steady,' admonished the other man, who was Roland Herne. 'Look here, have you got all the things that you are likely to want for such a case—oil, and wadding, and that sort of thing? No use for you to get home, and then have to turn straight round and come back again for them.'

'I've got them at home,' gasped the man. 'The missus was trying to put some oil on when I came away. Come along, man, come along, I say; we're losing time.'

On they went, too fast now for any breath to

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be wasted in talking. Roland Herne kept beside them, not because he could be of any help, but just by way of showing his sympathy.

Just when the two were getting into the boat to set off down creek, Jeff suddenly turned his head and spoke to Roland Herne. 'Look here, can't you go up the hill, and offer to sit up with the sick stranger to-night? He isn't much trouble, but Mrs. Scarth is nearly worn out, and the girls are too young for that sort of nursing.'

'I might,' answered Roland reflectively. 'I owe him something for getting sicker that time before, and saving me from losing my money. I offered to knock him up a coffin for nothing; but as he does not seem likely to need that, why, I can put in a turn at sick nursing instead.'

'He came near wanting the coffin last night, I guess,' muttered Jeff, and then with a mighty push the boat was run down, and Roland was left on the bank, watching until it disappeared round the bend in the creek.

To say that Mrs. Scarth was relieved by Jeff's quiet departure was to say very little. She was simply overjoyed to find that he was gone, and that she was spared the necessity of scolding him.

Anthony Rawson was better this morning, and although weak as an infant, was able to smile up into her anxious face, with a content which was mute witness to his freedom from pain.

Olive had just served three customers on

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alter another, and had told herself that business was very brisk indeed, when in sauntered Roland Herne, and sat himself down upon a flour barrel; while a fourth customer made anxious choice between canned herrings and tomatoes, and a new sort of canned beef, warranted clean and pure in the packing.

'What can I do for you, Mr. Herne?' asked Olive, when the corned beef had won the day and the purchaser had departed. Four people before noon was a record number of buyers in these times of slump, and every one of them had more than a mile to come to the store.

'I was wondering what you would be willing to let that place of Ezra Pratt's for?' Roland held his head on one side, and peered at her as if he had come to drive a very hard bargain indeed.

Olive hesitated. The rent of the store would be a serious drain upon her; but on the other hand, what was she to do for a shelter for the animals during the long months of winter?

'I should be very glad to let anyone have it at the rent that I pay, Mr. Herne,' she replied. 'Only the trouble is that I do not know where to keep the cow and the pigs in the cold weather. The snow may be down upon us before Mr. Rawson is able to leave the shed, and of course the creatures must be housed.'

Roland gazed about him dubiously, as if he really could not make up his mind; then he remarked in a casual sort of tone, 'The hotel

contractor wrote to me last week, that he'd sell any of the hotel stuff at half cost price. I could run you up a lean-to along the south wall of this barn; then you would have your animals handy, and not have to dig through six feet of snow when you wanted to go and milk.'

Olive's face lightened. 'What a very good idea! May I talk to mother about it? Then I will send Benny down with a note or a message this evening.'

'No need to send the boy down, I shall be up again this evening,' he said, getting off the barrel and turning as if to go; then looking back he said in a casual tone, 'I promised Jeff Morgan that I would sit up with your sick stranger to-night. Jeff will have his hands too full for a few days to show up here. That young imp, Joey Mullins, had got himself pretty badly burned, and Jeff has gone over to try and save him if he can.'

'Oh, poor Joey, I am sorry for him!' exclaimed Olive; and then her colour heightened as she said nervously, 'It is very kind of you to offer to sit up with Mr. Rawson, but I think that mother and I can manage, thank you.'

Roland waved his hand in an airy sort of fashion, but stuck to his point with a determination which showed that he meant to carry it through. 'I've settled it with Jeff, and having given my word, of course I shall come.' Then without giving Olive any more chance of objecting, he nodded briefly and disappeared. Olive was left wondering whether

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to laugh or cry over this sudden and unexpected lifting of a very heavy burden.

The thought of the watches, night after night in the shed, until the invalid should be strong enough to fend for himself, had been something like a nightmare to her.

That evening, when Blucy and Benny came home from school, they were brim full of all sorts of happenings; and among the rest, they told of how the Indian and his squaw, who were still in the neighbourhood, had tried to sell some gold at Sol Fry's saloon, but the man from Alaska, chancing in just then, had said that it was 'false hope' gold, like that which had come down creek in Jacob Scarth's canoe, so no one would give them money for it.

The next time the Indian woman came into the store to purchase tobacco, Olive refused money, and asked for 'gold dirt,' which was the term by which the raw material was known. At first the squaw shook her head, as if unable to understand. But Olive tried again and again, until presently with a chuckle the red woman pulled the papoose bag round in front of her, and fumbling among its contents, produced a lump of earth wrapped up in a rag. It was the same sort of earth, veined, and streaked with yellow, that Olive had found in the canoe, and her fingers trembled when she touched it, while there was a singing noise in her ears, and her heart seemed to beat at a tremendous rate.

'Where did you get this from?' she asked eagerly.

But the squaw shook her head in a vague fashion, as if the question were beyond her.

Olive had foreseen this, and was prepared for it. With a swift movement, she unfolded a length of printed cotton in gorgeous hues, scarlet, blue, and green, and draped it effectively round her shoulders.

'See, this beautiful thing is yours if I may know where to get more like that,' she said slowly, pointing to the gold dirt, and helping out her words with gestures.

The squaw gasped, permitted herself a low chuckle, then threw a glance over her shoulder to make sure that there was no one within earshot, hesitated and was lost.

'Three days on snow-shoes beyond the great morasses, when the frost is hard and strong, are caves, big caves, and they are filled with the yellow gold like this,' was the substance of what she said; then clutching at the gaudy rag, she fairly bolted from the store, leaving Olive to wonder why her father had stayed so long, whether he had found the caves, and whether indeed it was he who had come by his end on the lonely shores of Lake Tayu.

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH

The Story of the Quest

THE first snow had come, a blinding, bewildering smother of white dust, lasting for three days and nights. Then the wind dropped, the fall ceased, and the sun came out gloriously.

The frost was not yet keen enough to shut up the waterways, and the snow was not hard enough to lie firmly, so for a few days everyone had to be very uncomfortable. Houses ill-provided with stores had to go without comforts, or even necessities of life, until paths could be packed through the soft white dust.

Olive had the instincts of a business woman, and was not long in turning the snow difficulty to useful account. Roland Herne had made her a pair of snow-shoes in readiness for the first fall, and with Gretchen's help she soon had a good trail, firmly packed, out to the nearest houses, where there were women and little children. Then she took orders and delivered goods, carrying the store to the customers, because the customers could not come to the store. It was fortunate for her that Redway Falls had been a great place for snow-shoeing, and that by dint of much practice, she had grown very expert last winter.

The people in Orsay were mostly new-comers,

who had arrived in the boom-time, and had remained, living on what they had made, until the spring should show them a fresh chance of earning their living. Many of them had never spent a winter so far north before. Of course these had their experience to buy, and in most cases the price was a heavy one.

The miserable little wooden houses were too flimsy to keep out the blasts, sweeping straight down from the North Pole, and for these abodes there was no remedy save banking, which is burying them in snow up to the top shingle, so that only the chimney is left visible sticking out of the heap.

As there could be no school in those first days of snow, Bluey and Benny were hard at work helping Gretchen to pack the snow about the house, the shed, and the barn where the store was being kept. They had helped their father to do it last year, and so considered themselves quite expert at the business.

Olive had a helper now in the Indian squaw, who came daily to do a man's work, in order to earn the money for tobacco which her lord and master smoked as he lounged in the sunshine.

The squaw had a name which meant a tall pine tree, so the Scarths called her Mrs. Tall Pine, which pleased her mightily. Her husband, who answered to the name of Jerry, was a Shawnigan Indian, but she had come from the wigwams of the far distant Quamichan tribe. Her honesty was not above reproach, but she was not to be beaten at hard work, and

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served Olive like a dog, or a horse, in the hope of one day possessing some more of the gay printed stuff which Olive dispensed as reward for special services.

Anthony Rawson had so far recovered as to be able to leave his bed for a few hours each day, to sit by the stove, which had been put into the shed when the weather grew colder. He was at present only the wreck of a man, thin as a skeleton, and lame from the stiffness left by his broken leg. This would probably not have been so bad if Jeff Morgan had been able to come and attend to the limb in the earlier days of convalescence. But Jeff was away at Wernside, doing a hero's work in a small-pox outbreak among the miners. A doctor had been fetched from thirty miles away, but he could not stay; and finding that Jeff was equal to the needs of the situation, he had left him in charge of the four cases.

Roland Herne still came to sleep in the shed at night, and look after the invalid, who protested at being coddled, and might even have shaken off the shackles of kindness and care. But for the present his means had come to an end, and he was for the time practically destitute. He had written to England, and until the reply came to his letters, he had not the wherewithal to set forth again upon that quest of his which had so long made him a wanderer.

Olive came gliding up the hill on snow-shoes, skimming along at a tremendous pace, her face glowing with exercise and good health,

while only the wistful look in her eyes bore witness to the sorrow that lay behind.

Gretchen and the children were plying their task of banking the house with great vigour and much shouting. And peeping into the kitchen, Olive saw her mother sitting in the rocking-chair, wrapped in a shawl, and apparently dozing.

'No need to rouse her yet awhile. I will go and make up Mr. Rawson's fire, and see if he wants anything,' Olive murmured to herself, as she withdrew in a noiseless fashion, softly closing the door behind her.

The shed had already been banked, and the interior fel' beautifully warm and cosy when Olive entered. The window had been cunningly built round with snow, and a thin layer of ice carefully fixed at a foot distant from the glass to make a double window, thus allowing the light to come in, even though the view was obstructed.

Anthony Rawson was sitting in a chair, which Olive and Gretchen had improvised out of packing-cases and bacon-sacks; and he began to pull himself out of it when Olive knocked at the door, then entered with an armful of firewood.

'Please, please don't rise on my account,' she said hastily, trying to wave him back to the chair, and dropping half her wood in the process. This display of awkwardness made her cross; she was always troubled with self-consciousness in his presence, and the result would have been to make her avoid him alto-

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gether, but for the necessity there was for her to lighten her mother's burdens as much as possible.

'But it does me good to get up, and in a few days now I am going to make acquaintance with the outside world again,' he said slowly and feebly, while he stood with drooping shoulders watching Olive's quick, capable hands building up the fire.

A great pity for him stirred in her heart. He was so long in getting well, and she knew that it was because he wanted strengthening medicine and food of a more dainty kind than could be obtained in Orsay. But they had given him of their best, often eating their own bread dry that he might have butter, and more than this it was not possible to do.

'You are not feeling so well to-day, I am afraid,' she said kindly, the pity in her heart shining in her eyes, and vibrating through her voice, until it stirred his pulses, causing his heart to beat with quite painful violence.

'I am no worse,' he answered brusquely, his tone harsh because of his difficulty in steadyng it. 'But I am afraid that I shall not get much stronger until I am up and doing again.'

'What is it that you want to be doing?' she asked, standing erect and strong by the glowing stove, and looking down upon him; for he had subsided into the chair again, as if too feeble to remain longer upon his feet.

'Would you care to hear about what it is that I have to do?' he asked, making a sudden

resolution to confide in her the story which he had told in full to no one else during his long wandering in the great Dominion.

'Yes, indeed I should,' she answered brightly, understanding that it might do him all the good in the world to talk to someone of the cause which had made him a wanderer hurrying from town to town, and which he had been wont to speak of in his hours of delirium as 'The hopeless, never-ending search.'

'Sit down then: you are too far away to be talked to when you are standing up,' he said, with a wistful pleading that she could not withstand; so drawing a box forward, she sat down upon it, thankful for a brief rest after hours of going to and fro in the snow.

'Will that do better?' she asked with a laugh, throwing back the big woollen muffler in which she was swathed, and dragging the thick cap from the shining masses of her hair.

'Much better,' he said, with an approving nod; then his face grew grave, settling into haggard lines, and his voice had a harsh ring when he plunged into the story. 'I am hunting for my brother. It is nearly two years now since I came to Canada to find him, and I have been on his track a score of times, always to be disappointed in the end. Sometimes I have overrun the trail, and then have had to spend weeks in harking back, to pick it up again. Twice I did that in the back lands of Ontario, but that was last year, and soon after I first came. Then I heard of his coming west, and

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I was only three weeks behind him in passing through Winnipeg.'

'But how did you know?' demanded Olive, in surprise. Her own memories of Winnipeg were of monster crowds, whirling confusion, with a general rush and crush which would make it next to impossible to find anyone, even if he had been missed only a few minutes before.

'I came upon a man who had known Jules Webling in England, and he happened to mention having seen him at the dépôt only three weeks before, boarding a train for Vancouver City.'

'Jules Webling, was he your brother?' asked Olive, starting up with a sort of disgusted astonishment upon her face.

'No, no, of course not. Cyril is my brother, Cyril Rawson, but he and Jules were chums. I never saw the man but once, and then I didn't like him. Cyril and I had the row of our lives about the fellow, but it was of no use, and I had better have kept my opinion to myself, for it served no purpose only to make a breach between us,' said Anthony Rawson with a sigh; then he went on hurriedly as if to get an unpleasant business over—'Cyril was cashier in Uncle Charlie's office, and he embezzled a large sum of money, and bolted with Jules Webling!'

'Oh, how truly dreadful for you!' cried Olive, her face blanching out of pure sympathy for this man in his trouble, that was so much harder than anything which she herself had had to bear.

'It was bad for Uncle Charlie, poor old man; he just doted on Cyril, and the blow, coming as it did when he was in feeble health, killed him. I was at Oxford at the time, and he sent for me to receive his dying instructions, which were to throw up everything and search for Cyril—to know no rest and no peace until I found him.'

'That was hard for you,' commented Olive crisply.

'It meant the giving up of everything that I cared for in life,' said the invalid bitterly. 'My university career, my professional chances, and the good will of my poor old aunts.'

'But why?' Olive's eyebrows went up in question, for if the uncle sent him forth on such a quest, why should the aunts object?

Anthony Rawson smiled as he said, 'Ah, I was plainly not cut out for a novelist, for I don't fit the pieces of my story in at the places where they ought to go. Cyril and I have been orphans ever since I was two years old. He was brought up by Uncle Charlie, a London merchant, and my father's only brother; while I was reared by my mother's two maiden sisters, Lydia and Eliza Willyer, very aristocratic old ladies, who hate the word trade, and could never be brought to look upon Uncle Charlie as a social equal, because he bought and sold for a living. They gave me the best education in their power, and sent me to Oxford, so it is not wonderful that they hated the thought of my quest, and threatened to disinherit me if I persisted in it.'

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'That, too, must have been hard for you. Still you had given your word; besides, it was your brother you had to search for, and so you had no choice but to go,' Olive broke in, with a sympathetic understanding of the difficulties.

'I am glad that you think I did right,' he said, with more hope in his tone; then he went on, 'The circumstances were peculiar, and maybe it was pride ranged on the side of brotherly affection which helped to send me forth. Cyril had embezzled the old man's money; Uncle Charlie forgave him in the end, and sent me out to find and bring him back. But I did not understand the true reason of the sending, until my uncle was dead and his will was read. Then I found that there had been a time, after discovering what Cyril had done, when Uncle Charlie had been very bitter against him, for he had disinherited him in my favour if he did not come back in three years. So, you see, I had no choice but to come and find him, for I could not stay at home, to be enriched at his expense.'

'No, of course not,' said Olive, her tone vague as if she were thinking of something else. Then she burst out, 'But why should Cyril have troubled to embezzle his uncle's money, if he was going to inherit it?'

'He was in gambling difficulties,' replied the invalid. 'In reality Cyril hated trade, almost as violently as my aunts. He wanted to be an artist, but Uncle Charlie would not hear of it; so Cyril had to go to the city, perch on a stool at a high desk, and add up columns of figures

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as long as his arm, when he wanted to be studying art in Paris and Rome. Having been thwarted in one thing, he chose to defy Uncle Charlie in another. The old man hated any and every form of gambling, and having once caught Cyril plunging on the Derby, threatened to cut him off with a shilling if he ever did it again. Then Cyril, who seemed to be a born gambler, became mixed up with Jules Webbing, who was sharper, trickster, and thief; my poor brother got hopelessly involved, and disaster was the result.'

'It is horribly sad!' said Olive with a shiver, her face looking suddenly grey and pinched, as if the story had gripped her emotions.

'Yes, it is sad when a life gets ruined like that,' the invalid answered. 'Cyril was clever too. The genius of the family. I had to plod for everything I did, but he was fairly brilliant in all he undertook. It was I who ought to have been sent to sit at a high desk in a city office, while he should have been brought up by his aristocratic aunts, and turned into a gentleman for good and all. It is a pity that the characteristics of a child are not written in plain English on the outside of him, and then perhaps there would be fewer mistakes made.'

'Oh, dear, I don't think that would do at all!' laughed Olive. 'In such a case circumstances would have no chance to mould us; and then you know the great charm of life is its unexpectedness.'

'Humph, I am not so sure of that!' ob-

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jected the invalid, 'but perhaps I have been unfortunate in my experience, for the unexpected things that have fallen to my lot have been very much the reverse of charming. Take my journey to Dawson for instance. Last spring, just when the ice was beginning to break up, I got on the trail of Cyril again. Not Jules Webling this time, only Cyril. And I found that about a year before he had gone off in a coast steamer, prospecting for gold. I boarded the steamer, which was the *Pluck*, and discovered that the captain remembered Cyril; he even showed me a charcoal sketch on the wall of the cabin which Cyril had done. I came as far as Redway Falls on the *Pluck*; but when we landed there, I heard the captain call out that he had a parcel for Mr. Jules Webling, so I suddenly resolved to stay and see that individual for myself, to discover, if I could, what had become of Cyril.'

'So that was your reason for letting the boat go without you!' exclaimed Olive, but he only bowed his head and continued—

'Although I watched for him, he did not come, and next morning I went out to search for the place where he lived. They told me at the store that he was a hired man on an onion farm. I found the place, but I did not find Jules. Then when the dogs had been set at me, and I had gashed my face until it bled in extricating myself from a bramble thicket at the onion place, a burly man, who was I suppose the master, told me that Jules had set off only the day before for Dawson, where he

was to rejoin a chum who had gone on before.'

'I don't think that was quite true,' said Olive, shaking her head. 'I saw Mr. Webling that morning early, but he was very much wrapped up about the face and head, so perhaps he was starting then. George Foster was never very great at making exact statements.'

'Meaning the onion man?' asked the invalid.

Olive nodded. She was wondering why the Fosters should have troubled to set their dogs at an unoffending stranger, and also why it should have suited George Foster to give a false impression.

'Then I came back to the village, to make arrangements for going overland to catch up with the *Pluck* at Port Simpson,' went on the invalid; 'but hearing of the trouble at the schoolhouse, I stayed to do what I could there, going off with a guide next morning at dawn. I caught up with the *Pluck*, but I did not overhaul Jules Webling; and when I went on to Dawson, it was to find that I had again overrun the trail, and lost every trace of Cyril.'

'How desperately trying for you!' cried Olive, who was wondering with much secret shame that she could ever have suspected this man of condescending to mean thievery.

'Most things have been trying,' he answered; then went on, 'I waited at Dawson until I was tired. Then as neither Cyril nor Jules turned up, I made up my mind to spend the summer in doing a little prospecting on my own account, intending to go back to Dawson

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before the fall, to see if there should be any news of Cyril by that time. A rumour came of great gold finds on the Pelly River; and joining forces with an Irishman who had been for a year on the Klondyke, we set out. But my search for gold was no more successful than my quest of my brother. From the Pelly we wandered by Indian trail across to Lake Tayu, for O'Rell, that was the Irishman, had heard from some Indians of vast caves lined with gold in the hilly country stretching out from the southern end of the lake.'

' Ah, they must be the caves of which Mrs. Tall Pine spoke, three days on snow-shoes beyond the great morasses,' said Olive drearily. The very mention of the great morasses made her turn cold and shiver, for she thought of that wild desert in which her father must have found his grave. She still hoped with her lips, but despite her brave talk of her father's return, she had ceased to expect him.

' We made a raft to do the journey down the lake,' went on Anthony Rawson. ' O'Rell was great at that sort of thing, and we shipped the two mules, our miner's outfit, and the stores. For two days it wasn't at all bad travelling. We did not get along very fast, but it was easy travelling, and if we had only been wise enough to hug the shore, the great disaster might have been avoided. Crossing a wide bay on the third day, a terrific storm sprang up, and then the struggle for life began. First of all O'Rell pushed the poor beasts off to lighten the raft. Bah, it was sickening !

I never realized what a coward I was until that minute, and I would rather have been drowned myself than see those poor creatures struggling in the water.'

'Don't talk about it, don't, you will be ill again,' urged Olive, for the invalid had covered his face with his hands, as if even now he could not bear to think of that horrible scene.

'There isn't much more, and perhaps when I have told it out, it won't haunt my dreams so badly,' he said, looking up and trying to smile, though his thin face worked convulsively.
'When the mules were gone, we threw over the stores bit by bit; and I tell you it is awful to throw away all that makes life possible, just for a chance of saving life itself. Then without any warning the raft tipped, and O'Rell went screaming to his doom. It was dark by that time, did I tell you? And it was the most awful experience I have ever lived through. I don't know why I wasn't drowned, and I can only suppose that it was because my time had not come. We are all immortal until then, you know. In the dark I headed for what I thought was the shore, and reached it too. Luckily the night was warm and not very long, and when morning came I was glad to be alive, although I had wished myself dead from sheer misery many times during the night. Two days I wandered, living on Saskatoon berries, and anything else that I could find; then I came upon the canoe with the dead man, and you know the rest,' he said, coming to the end of his story with a sudden

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gasp, as if strength for the telling had come to an end too.

'Oh, how thoughtless of me to let you tire yourself so badly!' cried Olive, noting with alarm the ghastly whiteness of his face and the blueness of his lips. Then she made haste to warm him some soup, stood over him until he had swallowed the last mouthful, and then left him with a strict injunction to go to sleep.

She had hardly closed the door of the shed behind her, when Gretchen came flying out of the house in a state of wild excitement.

'Olive, Olive, we have been looking for you everywhere; Roland Herne has just come up from the Point, and he has brought our mail with his own. There is a tremendously long letter from Dora; we haven't read it yet, but the very first sentence says that she has found out who stole your letter.'

A sudden dizziness seized upon Olive, and the secret chill at her heart grew into icy cold. What would the knowledge avail now, if her father were really dead?

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

Dora as Detective

DORA was contriving to have a very good time indeed, and if it had not been for the drawback of having to spend five or six hours every day in the stuffy new schoolhouse, teaching stupid children with bad colds in their heads things they did not want to know, she would have been entirely happy and content.

Of course there was the uncertainty of her father's fate hanging always like a black cloud in the background. But she was philosophic, and argued that all the fretting in the world could not mend matters, and therefore it was of no earthly good to wrinkle her face and cry her eyes out about it. Her heart used to give sickening thumps and throbs every time the mail came in, but after one glance at the home letters, and a two minutes' pang of sick despair, she was herself again, dimpling and smiling, with gracious words for everyone ; so that it would have taken a very astute person indeed to find a heartache of any sort lingering there.

But behind all her jollity and frivolity, Dora carried a purpose rigidly formed, and strictly adhered to. She meant to discover who it was that had stolen Olive's letter, and was shrewd enough to know that the best way of

finding out was to say nothing about the matter

Arguing from the safe standpoint of 'Least said soonest mended,' she was careful not to mention the mysterious find of a bit of Amelia Foster's copybook among the wrappings of the gold dirt in her father's canoe. But she cultivated a friendship with the Fosters, and set herself to win their regard, using every weapon she possessed of personal charm and winning fascination.

The task was not difficult. In about two weeks Amelia was her willing slave, while the lumpy Joe would cheerfully walk two miles in the pouring rain for the pleasure of escorting the school teacher home when she came to their house to supper.

Even George Foster, who looked upon school-teachers as being a very inferior class of persons to himself, was disposed to be very gracious to Dora, and he strove to treat her with as much politeness as there was in his nature, although unfortunately that was not saying much.

Mrs. Baldwin did not altogether approve of her boarder's frequent visits to the onion farm, and even ventured to say so. 'Your sister did not go there, my dear, and you couldn't be far wrong to take her for a pattern in choosing your friends,' she said gravely, when for the fourth time in one week Dora announced her intention of going to supper at the onion farm.

Dora laughed, bringing out all her pretty dimples for Mrs. Baldwin's especial benefit;

then she said gaily, 'My dear Mrs. Baldwin, Olive is so clever and capable that she has no need to resort to innocent subterfuge as I have. Her teaching was above reproach, and her discipline a thing to be proud of. Now I am not a good teacher, simply because I am so awfully ignorant myself; and I have only the most rudimentary ideas of keeping order. So I should be asked to resign inside of a week, if I were not diplomatic enough to make the Fosters want to keep me. You know what Amelia and Joe are like: I should have no peace of my life if those two turned against me. But all the time they love me to distraction, their father has to be civil to me, and the other managers always look upon his opinions as being their opinions also, and in that way I can keep everyone, myself included, in a pleasant and happy frame of mind.'

'There is something in that certainly,' admitted Mrs. Baldwin. 'George Foster has got a way of influencing people, and he can make a teacher's life very unpleasant when he chooses.'

'Just so, and I prefer to have things pleasant,' remarked Dora. 'Olive might have found fewer thorns in her path if she had taken my way of going to work.'

'Well, for her own sake Miss Searth could not have gone running in and out of the Fosters' house as you do,' replied Mrs. Baldwin, with a rather scandalized air.

'Why not, pray!' demanded Dora, in surprise.

'Would it have been seemly, seeing that Jules Webling lived there?' Mrs. Baldwin's query had such a shocked ring in it that for a moment Dora stared at her in wide-eyed amazement, and then suddenly flung herself upon her.

'Dear, dear Mrs. Baldwin, do tell me all about it. Why should Olive not have gone because of this Jules—Jules What-is-his-name? Oh, how can you be so maddeningly mysterious, when you see how very badly I want to know?'

'If your sister did not tell you, I suppose it was because she did not want you to know, so I have no business to tell you,' Mrs. Baldwin said primly, yet with distinct yielding, for she was a very transparent woman, and found nothing so hard to keep as the secret of someone else, although it is only fair to say that her own reserves gave her no trouble.

'Olive is so truly modest that we never can get her to talk about herself,' panted Dora, hugging Mrs. Baldwin until the good woman was half strangled. 'But I do so badly, badly want to know all about it. Please, please tell me, for of course I would never breathe a word to anyone!'

'Mind you don't then, for I'm sure Miss Scarth would not like it,' Mrs. Baldwin said tartly, yet with such an evident desire to tell what she knew that Dora hugged her harder than ever, as if anxious to squeeze the information out of her.

'Jules Webling was in love with your sister, and wanted to marry her, but she would have

nothing to say to him, and rightly too, for although he was evidently a gentleman by education, he was only George Foster's hired man, and not a good hired man either. He used to hover round the schoolhouse more than Miss Scarth liked, but she had always the children with her, and she never gave him the slightest encouragement to bother her with his unwanted attentions.'

'Where is he now, this Jules Webling?' asked Dora, trying to remember whether she had ever heard the name before.

'Gone to the Klondyke, or somewhere up that way. He went off in a desperate hurry; some people thought that he had sloped without paying his debts, but George Foster said no, and I s'pose that he ought to know, if anyone did.'

A great trembling seized Dora, and she turned so white that she was glad to hide her face against Mrs. Baldwin's broad shoulders to conceal her feeling. A white light of knowledge had suddenly dawned upon her, but she was not quite sure yet, and must ask her questions warily.

'When did he go to the Klondyke, before Olive came home, or afterwards?' She made a great effort to render her voice just properly interested, but nothing more.

'He went in the same boat as your sister did, I believe, though it is likely enough she didn't see him. It was reported that he had gone days before, but I know he hadn't, although why he took to lying so low all of a sudden is more than I could understand,

unless it is true what some folks said, only you never can put faith in gossip.' Mrs. Baldwin gave a windy sigh at this, looking as if she were really grieved because gossip could not be depended on.

'What did people say?' asked Dora. Her colour was coming back, only her heart beat so quickly that she could scarcely keep from panting.

'They said he took fright because a strange man, an Englishman, came here asking for him. Ah, it was the very same man, my dear, who saved your sister's life that dreadful day when the schoolhouse was flooded. But I never heard the real rights of the story, and I could never get out of the Fosters why it was that their hired man went off in such a hurry.'

'I see,' said Dora aloud, nodding her head and smiling; but to herself she said, 'I shall make the Fosters tell me all about it though, and when I know that I shall know a great deal.'

'Oh, dear, what a lot of time I have wasted talking to you!' exclaimed Mrs. Baldwin, glancing at the clock, and feeling quite dismayed to find how fast the time had flown.

'It isn't really wasted,' said Dora soothingly, 'and I am sure that you will be better for having rested a little; and now you won't mind if I go to supper with the Fosters, will you? Because you see how important it is that they should still keep on liking me a little.'

Mrs. Baldwin laughed in her jolly, happy fashion. 'I don't think it is a very difficult

task to keep on liking you, but do go to Fosters as often as they ask you, if you think it is going to make your school life easier, George Foster is a fair terror to the teacher that he does not like.'

'Just what I imagined!' exclaimed Dora. Then she went into her bedroom and put her best frock, for she argued to herself that it was so much less fatiguing to make a good impression in one's best frock than in a shabby every-day affair.

Mrs. Baldwin shook her head a little when she saw the best frock, but she did not venture a word of reproof, although she drew a mental comparison of the difference in the sisters, and was altogether in Dora's favour. However, as she did not understand the motives of Dora, it was possible that she judged her rather harshly.

Joe was waiting for the teacher at the entrance of the village, where the trail turned in among the lots, and he was not feeling very happy, because he had been kept waiting so long.

'What a tremendous time you've been waiting,' he exclaimed, as he slouched along by her side, swinging his school-bag, and waiting to be talked into a good humour.

'Just like a boy!' laughingly exclaimed Dora. 'Didn't I take the trouble to put my best frock, and make myself look as charming as possible, yet after having done all that to please you, I only get a grumble for having kept you waiting. Why didn't you go on and let me find my way alone? I ought to know it by this time, for I come this road often enough.'

'Ah, I know better than go home without you!' said Joe, wagging his head, and looking the image of his father. 'If I had gone home without you, I should have been set to do chores, and I say that it is precious hard to be set that sort of thing, after a hard day of work at school.'

'Very hard,' murmured Dora sympathetically, but there was a suspicious quaver in her tone, and it was with great difficulty that she succeeded in choking back a gurgle of laughter. Joe was so notoriously idle at books and learning of any description, that it was really too rich to hear him talk about school work being hard.

'I don't take to farming, I never did,' continued Joe, swaggering more than ever, 'and I just hate the smell of an onion. When I'm a man I mean to go off to the Klondyke and dig for gold for all I'm worth. If I can manage to get rich quickly I shall be able to take it easy after that, and I just hate being hurried.'

'It must be lovely to be rich!' sighed Dora, thinking with a pang of how her own prospects of wealth had faded into nothingness. Then she asked, 'Do you know anyone who has gone to the Klondyke and got rich?'

'There's Jules Webling, he's gone, but I can't say whether he has made his pile yet,' replied Joe. 'Poor old Shucks! He just hated work of any sort, and he loathed onions as much as I do.'

'When did this friend of yours go?' asked Dora, her heart fluttering a little at the pros-

pect of being able to squeeze the information she wanted out of Joe.

But he grew suddenly confused and sullen, as if he understood and resented her curiosity.
‘Oh, he went a while back, but he isn’t so speak a friend of mine, only he lived with us hired man, and that’s how we knew him.’

‘Oh, I see,’ answered Dora cheerfully; but all the same she knew that she had received a check, and it made her all the more resolute to discover all that there was to know.

Mrs. Foster and Amelia received her with much demonstration of welcome as if they had not met her for at least six months, and Dora reflected upon what social successes she might have scored, if only that dream of riches had turned into actuality. But as there was no sense at all in crying over spilt milk, she just made the most of such poor chances as came her way, exerting all her power to please and succeeding beyond her expectations.

Amelia was fourteen, and considered herself a grown woman; she was tremendously sentimental, and very keen on having a real love affair, even though she went to school and was still in short frocks, with her hair plaited in a wispy pigtail which hung down her back, a fashion most tempting to pull. She had decided that the school-teacher would make a good confidante, and someone to confide in is a first necessity to a girl of that calibre.

Dora walked round Amelia’s bare little bedroom, inspecting the girlish treasures, and chattering about them, suggesting a new way

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of trimming Amelia's second-best hat, and giving it as her opinion that white muslin was better than pink tissue paper for draping a toilet-table, although Amelia clung obstinately to the pink paper idea, because it was cheap and did not want washing.

Then a drawing caught her eye, which she had never noticed before, for the simple reason that Amelia's second-best hat always hung on the same nail; and she exclaimed in surprise, 'Why, where did you get that from ?'

'That ? Oh, it is only the gift of a friend,' said Amelia, with a windy sigh.

'The friend's portrait, I suppose,' suggested Dora, with a twinkle in her eye; and then she leaned forward to inspect the drawing closer, and found to her amazement that it was almost identical with the charcoal sketch which her father had found in the dead man's sketch book, and that this also was labelled 'Tony.'

'No—o—o, not exactly,' said Amelia, with another sigh. 'My friend hadn't a photo of his own to give me, though he has carried off mine to be his companion in the Arctic solitudes of the Klondyke. He left that drawing with me as a memento of his friendship, but I can't say I care much about it, seeing that it is the portrait of another man; but we can't have all we want in this world, can we ?'

'No, indeed !' answered Dora regretfully; then she asked, with a laugh full of meaning, 'And who is your friend, pray, or is it a secret ?'

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' I suppose it ought to be a secret, but I don't mind telling you because you are such dear ! ' exclaimed Amelia, casting herself upon Dora, and hugging her within an inch of strangulation.

' Well, who was it, or is it ? ' demanded Dora, emerging from the embrace with just enough breath left to ask the question.

' It is Jules Webling,' said Amelia, simple and bridling with as much silly confusion as if she had been nineteen at the very least. ' We are very great friends, and I'm really the only one who knows about his great secret.'

It was on the tip of Dora's tongue to ask what the secret was. But she thought better of it, and merely gave Amelia another hug by way of expressing sympathy, which was just exactly what the young person yearned for.

' You are so different to your sister ! ' exclaimed Amelia. ' Mother always used to say that Miss Scarth had such high notions, and was so stiff in her ways, quite the toff you know, and not a bit like you are, dear ! '

Dora winced ; Amelia's innocent shaft had struck home with quite deadly effect, and for five minutes she downright loathed herself as well as the part she had set herself to play. Olive would not have stooped to professions of friendship which she did not feel, nor would she have truckled to these low, vulgar Fosters. Yet Dora knew full well that often in her heart of hearts she had accused her elder sister of lacking proper pride.

' Olive is worth a dozen of me, that is a fact ! '

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she said to herself, but aloud she murmured, 'Olive is a dear, but we have always thought her too grave, and lacking in a sense of humour.'

Amelia, who did not know what a sense of humour was, heartily agreed to this, and then after a little skirmishing round on indifferent topics, came back to the subject of Jules Webling again. 'He was quite the gentleman, though he did work as father's hired man, and I was very much in his confidence,' she said with a lofty air.

'Ah, that was—interesting,' commented Dora with a pause, in which she searched frantically for a suitable adjective.

'Yes, it was interesting. How beautifully you express things! I think friendship is one of the greatest joys of life, and oh, I did miss him when he had to go away so suddenly.'

'Was he unwell?' asked Dora, with a peculiarly vacant sort of look.

'No, no; news came that he must set off at once for the Klondyke. It was the very day after that impudent stranger came nosing round to find out if Jules lived here. Father set the dogs at him—at the stranger I mean, but the fellow did not seem to mind them in the least, though I fancy that he got rather a raking down from the bramble thorns afterwards. Jules hid up in the barn all that day, and pretended that he had started for Dawson. We had screaming fun over it too—then, and strangely enough, the very next day a summons came, and he really had to go. Wasn't it strange?'

'Very strange!' echoed Dora, who had grown white of face, and was trembling so badly that she was afraid Amelia must see it.

'It was a great shock to me,' the girl went on, shaking her wispy pigtail, and looking as if she were on the verge of tears. 'I went out to the barn next morning, and found him as wet through as if he had been swimming. He was reading a letter that I don't think he wanted me to see, and he said he must go off that very day. Father was cross and there was a regular row, but Jules stood firm, and went.'

'How did the letter come, by post?' asked Dora, who felt as if she were choking because of the effort she had to maintain her self-control.

'I don't know, I suppose so. But he did not tell anyone but me that he had had a letter, and I should not have known about it if I had not come upon him unexpectedly when he was reading it. I remember it was a very long one, and I was surprised because I had never known him have a letter before, all the time he lived with us, though he sometimes had parcels. He made me promise not to tell the others about the letter, and I didn't. never even mentioned it until you came, my dearest dear!' said Amelia, giving Dora another frantic hug.

'How sweet of you!' gasped Dora, in breathless fashion, and then Mrs. Foster called them to supper.

Dora had a good appetite as a rule, and th-

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rude abundance of the Fosters' supper spread was rather pleasing than otherwise, despite the fact that the knives were cleaned only once a week, and everything, inside the house and out, was permeated with the homely odour of the onion.

But to-night she could not eat. Food seemed fairly to choke her, while once or twice she was almost on the verge of bursting into tears. She had found out what she wanted to know, but the irony of it was that the knowledge was of no use, and she had just demeaned herself by her friendship with these horrid vulgar people for nothing at all.

If her father were dead nothing could bring him back to life, and besides, she had no evidence at all that Jules Webling had ever gone to that place beyond the great morasses, where the gold was supposed to be in such enormous quantities. But stay, had she no evidence? If Jules Webling had not reached the spot, how was it that the stolen letter, that letter which Amelia had seen him reading in the barn, was found afterwards among the gold dirt in her father's canoe?

Oh, the maddening mystery of it all! Would there ever, ever be a chance of discovering what had really taken place in that wild back country, beyond the great morasses, whether her father had gone in such high hope and expectation last spring? And would they ever get a true account of what had befallen him, when he was found dead in his boat on the shore of Lake Tayu? 'If I were a man, or

even a boy, I would start off and see for myself what has happened. But a girl is no good at all !' sighed Dora, quite forgetting that if she had been a man she could not have crossed the great morasses until the frost came to give a firm road over the quags and swamps of that fearsome region.

Surely, surely the Fosters had never been so long at supper before ! The reek of cabbage water fought with the odours of hot boiled bacon and molasses pudding ; the kerosene lamp, being badly trimmed, smelt vile, and then some milk boiled over on the stove, adding its quota to the other items.

Dora bore it until it seemed just impossible that she could bear it for another minute. Outside the wind and rain were dashed against the window. If only she could get out there and fill her lungs with that sweet clean air, how delicious it would be ! But she was wedged in between Amelia and Mrs. Foster and could not move.

' You are not eating anything, Miss Dora, and your face is as white as your scarf ! ' claimed Mrs. Foster, in kindly concern ; she was always distressed if her guests did not display huge appetites, and the more they ate the more her satisfaction grew.

' I—I am not very hungry to-night, thank you—and—and—' But Dora's faltering sentence never got finished ; she rose to her feet, groping with her hands before her like a blind person, to find the way out. Her strength failed her, however, and to the con-

sternation of the others, she dropped fainting on the floor.

There was a terrific commotion then. Amelia burst into frightened shrieks, under the impression that Dora was dead, Joe boo-oo-ed like a weaning calf, George Foster in his haste to do something to help trod on the foot of a dog stretched out by the stove, making the creature yelp wildly, which did but add to the confusion, and it was only Mrs. Foster who had the presence of mind to order the door to be opened, letting in the storm wind to revive the swooning girl.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH

For Pity's Sake

OLIVE hurried into the kitchen to find M. Scarth standing in the middle of the floor with tears falling like rain down her face, as she read the closely-filled sheets of Dora's letter.

'Dear mother, is anything bad the matter?' asked Olive anxiously.

'No, child, no. Only Dora has found who stole your letter, and we know now where she must have been that went off to that place where your father had gone, and is doubtless there now,' she answered with a sob.

'I expect he is there now, digging out gold by bucketfuls, and if it is all "false hope" like that which we found in father's canoe, just isn't there a big disappointment in store for him!' exclaimed Gretchen, with such a grim note in her voice that Olive turned suddenly away.

'Don't, dear, it hurts,' she cried, and Gretchen covered her face with her hands, then stood quietly crying, because Dora's letter had torn open so many wounds which time and hard work had begun to heal.

'Read the letter aloud, dear,' said M. Scarth, putting the closely written sheet

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into Olive's hand. 'No, don't begin at the beginning; I have read the first two sheets, where she tells us how she found out from the Fosters about Jules Webling having stolen your letter. That part might embarrass you to read aloud, for dear Dora is not very reticent, and she says some things which might be more happily forgotten.'

Olived flushed an uncomfortable red. Like her mother, she felt that Dora might have kept a decent reserve concerning the gossip that had been gleaned from Mrs. Baldwin about Jules Webling's unfortunate preference, and she was grateful indeed that the part of the letter dealing with the subject was not to be made public property. A hurried glance at the first two sheets made her flush more hotly than ever; then turning to the third sheet she began to read aloud, standing where her mother had stood in the middle of the floor, while the others were grouped closely around her.

'Of course, Mummie dear, we have proof positive now who had the letter that was stolen from Olive's school-desk, and we know that Jules Webling either followed father into the wilderness, or was there before him. That part is all quite plain, but the puzzle is as to what happened after, and here we have to go a great deal by guess-work, which as Mrs. Baldwin tells me, on an average at least four times a week, is very untrustworthy stuff.'

'Now, this is what I think happened—those two lonely men meeting in the wilderness

would agree to work together; there would enough gold for both and they would be company for each other in that awful loneliness and in time they would become almost friends, for you know how trusting dear father was, and he loved everyone, no matter how unworthy they might be down at the bottom; then I think that after a long time of working and getting out the gold, they decided that one of them should come home and register the claim, then take back food supplies, which of course must have been growing very short.

' The choice fell upon father, and it is easy understand why—he would be wanting to see all so badly that he would be just yearning to come home; while the other man, being without family ties, would prefer to go on working, and getting rich as fast as he could. Then dear father started, following most likely some water way which drained the great morasses, and steering always by that little old compass that Mr. Rawson brought home with the watch. But he was beginning to feel ill, poor darling, perhaps some of the hardships he had gone through had started some disease; then he became more and more ill, until finally he lay down in that little canoe, in the quiet little bay on the lake shore, and his soul went home to God. Dear Mummie, I lay awake most of last night thinking of what that quiet ending must have been, and it comforted me inexpressibly to think that in all those weeks of absence from us, dear father was not alone.

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course, to steal the letter and act upon it, but then we know that men will fling away honour and everything else in the desire for gold, so it is of no use to blame him too much. And if all that Amelia Foster says about him is true, he is an educated man, and a gentleman, so he would have been more of a companion for dear father than any common lout of a prospector who might have found his way up there.

' We have often blamed Olive, at least I know that I have, for not taking more care of that letter; but when I think of the shocking solitude of those wilderness places, it makes me feel glad that there was someone for dear father to speak to.

' Now I want to ask a favour, and please don't be angry with me, Mummie, and don't let Olive be angry either. When the frost comes, and it is possible for anyone to cross the great morasses, I want you to send a relief expedition, to help that poor Jules Webbing to get back to civilization. Think of his plight! All these weeks he must have been waiting and waiting for father to come back. Even when the frost comes he will not be able to find his way back, because, remember, the letter and the map were in father's canoe, and all the time he will be waiting and waiting for help to come to him. I know the relief party will cost money, but I will send half my salary, month by month, to help pay for it, and please, please, for pity's sake, dear folks at home, do something to succour this poor man.

' We shall have our reward, whatever it costs,

for just think what a lot he will have to tell us of the last weeks of dear father's life.

' I dreamed when I fell asleep this morning that it was not dear father who was found dead in the boat, but Jules Webling, and I awoke with tears of joy running down my face. But of course that could not be, because if he had not come himself, dear father would have sent a letter; moreover there was the watch and the compass for identification, so my tears of joy turned to tears of sadness, as I thought of our darling's lonely ending.

' It has been such a relief to me to write this long, long letter, and do please—please send someone to help Jules Webling. I am sure that Jeff Morgan would go, and Roland Heron too. I don't think that I could ever by any possibility be as wise and clever as Olive, or as hard-working as Gretchen, but, Mummie dear, I do think our heavy troubles are making me a better girl than I used to be. Of course it is very horrid to think that we shall always have to be poor, and I hate having to mix with common, low-down people like the Fosters, who have such uncomfortable smelly things for supper. But I am making the very best of everything, and I am pleasant to everybody. Heaps of love to you all,

' Your affectionate
' DORA.'

' What a darling letter!' exclaimed Mrs. Scarth, who was weeping copiously. ' Olive, can we send someone to help that poor man?

It is really awful to think of what his fate may be, if no one troubles to help him out.'

'We must think about it, mother, but there is no immediate hurry; it will take quite a week of hard freezing before the snow will bear across the quags,' said Olive.

Then a customer for the store came knocking at the door, and Olive went away to attend to his wants; but in her heart there was a very strong feeling that she did not want to help Jules Webling. She did not consider him worth helping. Always, always she had been conscious of a secret mistrust of the man. It had been her safeguard in her lonely homesick days at Redway Falls, when he had tried so hard to make her care for him.

The story she had heard from Anthony Rawson that day had had its dire effect in making her unwilling to spend money and trouble in helping Jules Webling out of a fix which he had plainly made for himself. Then, too, she was by no means of Dora's opinion about his having been such a comfort to her father during those weeks of loneliness. Doubtless if there had been no interloper on the scene, her father would have come home at once to register his claim, and then these terrible troubles would not have been.

Olive served her customer in a very abstracted frame of mind, and was actually weighing out salt instead of meal, until the man told her of her mistake.

'I beg your pardon,' she said, in sudden confusion. 'The fact is my thoughts were

very far away, and I was wondering how it would be possible to get across the great morasses.'

'What, do you mean that you are thinking of taking a trip in that direction yourself?' asked the customer, who was the man from Alaska, who had pronounced upon gold dirt found in the canoe.

She shook her head. 'No, I am far from expert at snow-shoeing, but I do not think that I shall go far in that direction,' she said quietly; then after a moment of hesitation she went on: 'We have reason to think that the man who must have stolen the leather and map, which I found in my father's canoe, is out there in the wilderness still; and Dora, my sister, who is away at Redway Falls, thinks that we ought to send someone out there to help him get back. What is your opinion?'

'Let him get out the way he got in, or stay there altogether,' rejoined the man from Alaska bluntly. 'He'll come when he is ready, make no mistake of that, and it would be a pity to distract him before he is wanting to come.'

'But Dora thinks that he is waiting for his father to come,' said Olive, with an air of distress, 'and—and of course he can know nothing of whatever of the tragedy on the lake shore!'

'Perhaps not. But all the same he must know that something has gone wrong, or else your father, poor man, would have been back there before this. My opinion is, that if anyone went to seek him now, they wouldn't find him, for he would have cleared himself. At all events, he will be gone.'

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when he hears that your father died on the way home, he'll just go and register the whole claim in his own name, thinking to do your father's widow and orphans out of any share in the property. I know what manner of meannesses that sort of cattle get up to. But he will be jolly well served out when he finds that his precious gold dirt ain't nothing prettier or more profitable than "false hope".

The man from Alaska took himself and his purchases away in a gale of laughter, but Olive stood leaning against the meal barrel, with a very dissatisfied expression of face.

She was torn in two ways. The rigid sense of justice in her nature said, 'Let the man suffer,' but the gentle womanly pity in her heart besought her to help him out of his terrible plight.

What should she do ? What could she do ? There was no one whom she could consult. If Ezra Pratt had been in Orsay still, she would have gone to him with some confidence of getting a wise judgment. Even Jeff Morgan might have been relied upon, but there was no prospect of seeing him for weeks to come.

'I must just wait and see,' she said with a sigh ; then remembering her neglected work, she started on packing parcels of provisions for snow-bound families, and kept hard at work until the short day began to close in, and Gretchen ran out to help her finish. Now the snow had come, they closed the store every day at sundown, for if there were no customers it was only a waste of kerosene to light the place up.



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(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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Business was very slow just now. But at least Olive had the consolation of knowing that the family would not want for food, which was a huge comfort to her.

She did not see Anthony Rawson all that day; he had a headache, her mother said, and had gone to bed early. Roland H. usually came up to sleep in the shed with him, but Roland was a prisoner just at present, having jammed his foot under a heavy sled and smashed two toes so badly that he was compelled to be an invalid for a few days.

There was frost that night, but the morning was laden with a promise of more snow. Gretchen started out early for fear of being caught in a blizzard; she was on snow-shoes, and dragging a sled laden with goods from the store to delivery at the homes of the snow-bound.

"It is a mercy that Dora is not at home; she would be so awfully shocked at the thought of your dragging that sled about the country," laughed Gretchen, as she helped to tie a canvas tightly down over the goods, so that in the event of an upset they might not be jolted off.

"What can't be cured, must be endured," said Olive. "If my customers cannot come to me I must go to them, and it is of no use being upset about anything when the living has to be earned." Olive answered, with the cheerful philosophy which stood her in such good stead, and saved her from many a pang when the nature of her work threatened a loss of dignity.

She had a long round that morning, and

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air lacked the exhilarating zest which made outdoor exercise such a pleasure in winter.

'There is more snow coming, and it will be a very heavy fall,' she murmured to herself, as she noticed how the grey clouds bulged downwards, over the dreary black forests of spruce and pine. Then she hurried on faster, for it would be terrible to be caught far from home in the white smother of a blizzard.

When she had delivered the last parcel of goods she turned homewards, jerking the empty sledge after her, and skimming along the surface of the snow like a big bird. It was a very lonely bit of country just there, a long wide valley, pierced by deserted copper workings, and hedged by forests, but it was a shorter way home than by going round the creek, and there was a nervous haste upon Olive to-day to get back before another fall of snow began.

The valley had its dangers, however. She had not gone far before suddenly the solid snow-bank under her feet gave way, and in she plunged.

She had tumbled into a copper-working, over which the snow had drifted with deceptive smoothness. Fortunately it was not a deep one, and by dint of much struggling and floundering she got out again, not much the worse for her tumble.

But it had frightened her badly, and she had just made up her mind to go back up the valley and take the longer way home by the creek, when she heard a cry, a human cry, in a faint but imploring tone.

' Someone else is in trouble; I must go help,' she said to herself, speaking a now, in order to keep her courage up, for a wandering snowflakes drifted into her face, she knew only too well that there were behind.

Shouting at the top of her voice, she wa for an answer, straining her ears now, because the moaning wind seemed to fill all the he air with sound. Just for a moment thought it must have been the wind which had heard; but no, there it was again, a hu cry, but weak and faint, as if the one called had nearly reached extremity.

' I am coming—where are you ? ' she ca her voice having an anxious ring, for the va was so wide and lonely, so full too of pits hollows where digging had been going that any moment might find her floundering another hole.

But she must find where that cry came from and give what help she could. It would be impossible to go home without finding who was in trouble. The cry would haunt her dreams, she would have no peace sleeping or waking, unless she did her utmost to succor the unfortunate who had come to grief in such fashion.

' Where are you ? ' she cried again; and a flurry of snow drove into her eyes, stinging them so sharply that she was glad to round and get her face out of the wind.

A choked gasping sound answered her, peering anxiously round, she descried a colou

something being jerked to and fro, out among the hollows in the middle of the valley. That was the dangerous part, for some of those hollows were half-full of water.

But go she must, and shouting all the time, she made her way round the edges of the hollows until she reached almost the spot where the coloured stuff was waving till.

'Why, I do believe it is Mrs. Tall Pine!' she exclaimed to herself, with a laugh which ended suddenly, for she remembered that the dusky squaw had not turned up yesterday to do the accustomed work. Surely, surely the poor creature could not have been down here then!

The mere thought was appalling, for Olive had heard all sorts of stories about people being missing all the winter, and then their dead bodies, mummified by frost, being found in the spring.

'I am coming; I will help you out,' she cried, and the coloured rag was jerked more wildly than ever, to show that her words were understood.

Very cautiously she went forward. There was a deep furrow ploughed in at the other side of the hollow, showing where the unfortunate prisoner must have tumbled in; and remembering her own experience, Olive was all the more anxious to help this poor victim of the hidden dangers of the valley.

'Ah!' she cried shrilly, and cast herself on her back just in time to keep herself from sliding on a moving snow-bank into the hollow below; then slipping off her snow-shoes, she

beat the snow until it was firm, advanced a step or two, beat again, and so on, being in fashion able to make a safe path for herself.

'Help, help, gracious white woman,' cried the voice again; and kneeling down, peered cautiously over the edge, to find not merely Mrs. Tall Pine, but also her son, whose husband had been caught and held prisoner in the hole.

'Pull us out, pull us out, gracious woman, in mercy pull us out; it was yesterday when we fell in,' wailed Mrs. Tall Pine. Suddenly displayed a wonderful command of the English language. But the solemn man by her side said nothing at all, only looked at Olive with a sort of resigned scorn, as if he were quite sure that a slip of a girl like that would be unable to get them out of their dangerous predicament.

Strangely enough it was that look of scorn which braced Olive's energies into what was to be done, in the quickest and most effective manner. First of all she punched and kicked a deep hollow in the ground, digging frantically with the end of her snow-shoe to make it deeper. Into this she slid the sledge, then got into it herself to weigh it down; and taking the two ropes, cast them deftly into the hole, which must have been ten or twelve feet deep.

'Do you come first,' she called to the man, 'then the two of us can pull up the man. I cannot pull him up alone.'

'We pull us up ourselves, but me come to help you,' said the man, who was now called Mrs. Tall Pine, her voice stronger and louder because of the hope in her heart.

'Ready!' called Olive; she was sitting on the sledge now, with her feet stuck squarely against the bank in front of her, a snow-shoe in either hand, the points likewise thrust into the bank, to take a share of the breaking strain.

She was not afraid of the ropes giving way, for they were new; what she did fear was that she and the sledge would be jerked out of the hole and dragged into the pit with the other two unfortunates, in which case their plight would be no better, while hers would be infinitely worse.

'Ah, ah, be careful!' she shrieked in terror as at the first tug on the ropes the sledge heaved, and there was an awful moment when it seemed as if she must be dragged out of her place. Could she hold on? The veins swelled in her forehead, and she was almost choking with the violence of her efforts, as with feet and hands she dug at the snow-bank against which she had wedged herself.

Again the sledge heaved, she was dragged forcibly up, and then with a jerk the tension slackened; she was flung violently back, bumping her head until she saw stars, and a moment later the poor little squaw, in an ecstasy of gratitude, was grovelling at her feet.

'It is the gracious white woman that has saved two lives,' the poor thing said, tottering and almost falling in her weakness.

'The second one isn't saved yet, and it is the hardest part that is to come,' said Olive. 'Have you got snow-shoes? Where are they?'

'In pithole, broken!' answered Mrs. Pine in tragic tones.

'No matter; tell your husband to tie them all in a bundle, and let me pull them up for you,' commanded Olive briskly. She had settled her plan of campaign now for the second attempt, and was anxious to get it put into operation as quickly as possible. Mrs. Tall Pine stood on her husband's shoulders to get a better hold on the ropes, but a longer rope would be necessary for him, as he had no one to stand upon.

Olive detached one end of the rope from the sledge and flung it into the hole. The Indian bound the snow-shoes in a bundle at the end of the rope, and she hauled them out. Luckily only two were broken, so there would be little difficulty about the homeward journey, as the squaw could be towed into Orsay on the sledges. Meanwhile Olive knotted the broken bits of framework at intervals along the rope, to make foot-holds and hand-grips, by means of which the red man might climb out of the hole.

'Now sit down, and dig your feet in,' Custer said to the squaw, with an authoritative wave of her hand, when all was ready, and she had thrown the rope into the hole.

Mrs. Tall Pine promptly sat down, but was weak from cold and fasting, and seemed to have no power of resistance. Olive strove to keep the sledge from being dragged up; but there came a fiercer tug on the rope, and before she could save herself, she was jerked first up, and then down she plunged into the hole.

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CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH

A Strange Story

So long Olive seemed to be in falling, that she had time to think of the distress there would be at home by reason of her non-return. Then suddenly her feet were entangled in something, and in a moment she discovered that it was the rope, and had clutched at it with all her might.

But even then she could not have saved herself if it had not been for the Indian, who promptly dropped back into the hole when he saw what had happened, thus relieving the strain on the rope, to which the squaw was clinging with the desperation of despair.

One helpless wriggle Olive gave, which nearly dragged squaw, sledge and everything else in on the top of her; then she steadied herself, and with slow caution made her way back, holding fast to the rope, but putting as much of the weight as possible on to the snow, digging in a hand or a foot at every movement forward. Luckily she had not fallen right in, but had fouled the rope as her feet shot over the brink, and so there was the shorter distance to get back.

In reality it could not have been much over a minute before she was safely back on the sledge again, but it was like a long, long wrestle

with fierce menacing peril and she was with exhaustion, dropping into a limp and beginning to sob.

The squaw touched her with a cold, bling hand. 'Make haste; try again; snow coming fast,' she said with ple tones, her dusky face showing greenish against the dazzling white of the snow.

Olive flung up her arms, and slapped sides with a nervous movement. Dare try again? But she must, she must, for would all perish if they stayed where were. Then remembering that Mrs. Tal had managed to hold the rope steady she climbed back to safety, she took again, and settled herself for another effor

Side by side they sat squarely down upon sledge, and each drove her feet in hard at the bank of snow which had given way so l the time before. Then further help tucked a snow-shoe under each arm, and the squaw do likewise, after which she out that they were ready.

Again came the dreadful strain, while moment seemed as long as an hour, and set teeth and tortured muscles, Olive hung to the snow-shoes, making her weight on sledge as heavy as possible, in the hope keeping it firmly down.

Heave, heave, jerk, jerk! Olive dared not look to see how nearly the man was up. whole strength was concerned with keeping herself down. Suddenly the tense silent endurance was broken by a snuffling grun

to her, and she opened her eyes to see the Indian sprawling on the ground by her side. He was safely up, and the next thing to be done was to get off home as quickly as possible.

Olive sprang to her feet with a sob of thankfulness, and not even staying to unknot the pieces of broken snow-shoes from the rope, she fastened it on to the sledge, but left it this time with two separate ends, so that she might take one track and the Indian another, thus lessening the danger of another catastrophe from hidden holes.

Mrs. Tall Pine wanted Olive to ride on the sledge, for it did not fit in with her notions of social fitness that the white girl should drag her home through the howling storm. But on this point Olive was firm, and in a very few minutes she and the Indian were scurrying through the powdery smother, their snow-shoes creaking with each lift of the foot, but with no other sound to break the silence.

Olive looked back ever so many times, but always the squaw was crouched in the same position, half-kneeling, half-sitting, and always tightly gripping the sides of the sledge. Plainly the red woman might be trusted to take care of herself, and as looking backward on snow-shoes was a highly risky proceeding, Olive refrained from indulging in it to her own detriment; and presently, to her great relief, they had left the desolate and dangerous valley behind them, and were climbing the hill to Orsay.

She made them stop at the store, and gave them some food, and though they made little show of gratitude, the way in which their hands closed over the gifts was more eloquent than speech, and they went off to their burro among the scaffold poles of the unfinished hotel with deep low grunts of satisfaction.

'Did they help you home?' asked Gretchen, who was in the store when Olive entered with the two Indians, and had watched the proceedings in considerable surprise.

'No, poor things, I helped them,' said Olive, her voice shaking a little, for now she realized how very tired out she was with all the strain she had gone through. 'Oh, Gretchen, those poor creatures spent last night in a hole in the back valley, and they must have stayed there all to-night if I had not happened upon them, and I have had a really awful time getting them out. But although they must be nearly perished with cold and hunger, I have heard not one word of complaint from either of them.'

'Didn't they beg?' asked Gretchen with a laugh, for Mrs. Tall Pine and her husband had grown into a by-word in Orsay because of their persistent begging, which, with a little petty pilfering, formed their visible means of livelihood.

'Never a word,' said Olive, 'but I brought them in and gave them food, because I could not have eaten my own supper to-night if I had thought they were hungry.'

'Humph, it isn't as if they were white,' exclaimed Gretchen; then she burst out, 'No'

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am going to watch and see if the old saying comes true in this case.'

'What old saying?' asked Olive, who was not so well versed in the vernacular as her sister.

'They say that the Red Indian and the dog are the only creatures on the face of the earth who never forget a friend or a foe,' answered Gretchen, 'and I am anxious to see whether Mrs. Tall Pine and old Solemn-Sides, her husband, will remember how you have helped them to-day.'

'Time will prove,' said Olive lightly; 'meanwhile let us shut up, for it is snowing too fast for anyone to come up now.'

'Are you going in to see Mr. Rawson to-night?' asked Gretchen, as they covered up things which might freeze, and put lids on the meal barrels for the night.

'It is not necessary,' Olive said, with outward composure, but a warmer colour stole into her face. Somehow any mention of the invalid always did embarrass her, although she tried very hard not to show it. But her secret confusion was due to the fact of her having seen so much of the sick man's inner mind during the days and nights that he was delirious.

'It may not be necessary, but at least it would be kind,' retorted Gretchen, with a touch of asperity; 'just think how awfully lonely the poor man must be, shut up in that dismal shed day after day, with never anyone fresh to speak to!'

'Stop a moment, I've got an idea!' exclaimed Olive, as Gretchen was locking the

door of the store. 'Let us drag the sledge then we can take him from the shed straight indoors to supper. That should be a wild sipation after the life he has led during the past weeks.'

'But see how it is snowing,' objected Gretchen as they groped their way through the white smother, which was thicker than ever.

'It won't hurt him if we cover him all over. Run in and tell him that we are coming to get him in ten minutes, will you, dear, and I will go and prepare mother for his reception,' Gretchen said, flushing hotly, because of the riotous gladness in her own heart. She shunned any sort of intercourse with Anthony Rawlins now which meant they two alone, but to have him in the family circle was altogether different and would be just utterly delightful.

Mrs. Scarth was pleased also, but doubtful of the wisdom of bringing an invalid through a snow-storm.

'Oh, we will take care of him, mother, if it is too bad for him to go back, we will put him to bed in Benny's room, and he shall sleep on the settle by the stove,' suggested Gretchen; and this idea being carried away to bring the invalid to the house.

'Are you sure that I shall not be in the way?' he asked wistfully, as he looked at Olive. 'A stranger thrust into the sanctified circle of the domestic circle is apt to be a fearful thing, especially in a small house at winter time.'

'But you are not a stranger now,' she said with a laugh, 'and the sanctities of our domestic circle are limited to cooking our food and mending our clothes; if these things don't bother you, you won't bother us. Now please sit down on the sledge, then we will cover this big rug right over you; there will be two minutes of smothering discomfort, and then you shall emerge in mother's kitchen, and eat your supper amid brisk competition.'

He sat down on the sledge without another word, and Olive covered him up, while Gretchen banked the fire, for both of them realized that the shed would be a better place for him at night than Benny's room, which was so tiny and cold.

It was not snowing quite so badly now; in an hour or two it might be entirely clear, but they would risk that; and drawing the sledge carefully out of the door, which they shut and locked, they went swiftly over the few yards of shovelled and beaten path, into the warm kitchen, where firelight, lamplight and cheerful supper bustle made it the most delightful place in the world to Anthony Rawson, after those weeks of being shut up in the shed.

They would have been quite a merry party if it had not been for the shadow which hung over the home, and each one remembered that it was the pale gaunt stranger in their mother's rocking-chair who had found their dear father lying dead in the canoe, and had given the body the only possible burial, by casting it into the lake.

Even Benny was subdued as he thought it, and although he responded civilly enough to the overtures of the invalid, he still had some reserves concerning him.

But Bluey sat at his feet in an attitude of deepest devotion, looking up at him with such comical scrutiny that the others could not help smiling, and Mrs. Scarth told her that she would make Mr. Rawson uncomfortable if she stared so hard.

'I'm sorry,' she murmured in confusion, 'but he is so like Tony, you know.'

Olive started up with a look of alarm, tried to give Bluey a caution, for the like suddenly struck her, although hitherto it had been of a most elusive and puzzling character.

But her warning came too late, for leaning forward the invalid gripped the little girl's shoulder, asking eagerly, 'What do you mean by saying that I am like Tony? That's my name, you know!'

Bluey gave a half-scared look at him, turned to her mother; but there was no warning in Mrs. Scarth's face, for Olive had not mentioned the common property of the story confided to her by Anthony Rawson.

'Is it your name?' the child asked dubiously. 'I thought it was Anthony. Did they ever call you "dear old Tony"?'

'Hush, Bluey, don't talk so much, darling; you will tire Mr. Rawson,' said Olive; and now there was such an imploring note in her tone that even Bluey was impressed.

But Anthony Rawson, his faculties quite

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ened with much brooding, had been quick to detect the distress in Olive's tone, and he turned upon her with desperate eagerness.

'What is it you know? What are you keeping from me?' he demanded, his panting breath betraying his rising excitement.

Olive had not helped to nurse him through so many weeks of sickness without understanding how bad such fierce excitement was for him, and how it might throw him back. So rising from her seat, she came swiftly to his side, and standing with her hand dropped lightly on his trembling arm, she said quietly, 'I have not kept anything from you; indeed, until Bluey began to talk, I had no idea that there was anything to keep back. But now it seems to me that perhaps we can tell you quite a lot about your quest, only it is not altogether happy hearing, so don't you think it would be better to wait until the morning?'

'No, no; tell me what there is to hear. Don't you see that it is the uncertainty which is so hard to bear?' he said, looking up at her with the mute appeal of his eyes which she never could withstand.

Olive turned and went into her bedroom for the writing-case, in which she kept the book of sketches that had been found in possession of the stranger who had told her father about the gold.

While she was gone no one moved nor spoke, and the noise of the wood burning in the stove sounded quite loud in the profound hush of the room.

Olive came back with a step which did falter, but her face was very white. She feeling that she must be brave and strong because upon her would rest the burden of keeping the invalid from breaking down.

'This is the book,' she said quietly, 'my father found on the poor man in the snow on the Dease Water trail; he brought home, but although mother and he did everything they could for him, the man died. He would not tell his name, but he told father a wonderful gold find he had come upon beyond the great morasses.'

'So he is dead—poor Cyril! And my search is over at last!'

Anthony Rawson's face was covered with his hands, and for a few moments there was profound silence in the room. Then Cyril said gently, 'Would you like to go away from your room now?'

'Not yet,' he said, looking up into her eyes and trying to smile. 'I want to hear all about the matter, all that your mother can tell me. Then I shall try to take a leaf out of your book in patient bearing. But why were you not told of this before?'

'You have not been very fit to hear such tragedies, you know,' Olive reminded him gently, speaking for her mother, who was looking the picture of distress at this amazing coincidence, which was linking the man who had died with the man who was going to get better. 'Besides it never once occurred to us that there was any connexion between

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and the poor fellow whose discovery laid the foundation of all our troubles.'

'What discovery?' he asked blankly. 'Pardon me for seeming inquisitive, but this concerns me, you know.'

Mrs. Scarth moved a little nearer to him, and taking one of his hands in her kind, gentle clasp, she told him the story of the stranger's death, neither glossing over the pathos, nor dwelling on the grim irony of the poor fellow's fate, but just telling a straightforward story of all that lonely ending had meant to them as a family.

'How strange that both of us should come to be dependent on your kindness!' exclaimed Anthony Rawson; 'truly there is nothing in this world so amazing as its coincidences. To think that I should hunt for poor Cyril through the length and breadth of Canada, and then, without knowing it, lie sick for weeks and weeks under the very roof where he died.'

'You are quite sure that it was your brother?' asked Olive.

'I am quite sure that the man who drew those sketches is my brother, and I suppose there is no reasonable doubt that they were done by the person on whom they were found,' the invalid said, looking from one to another, as if seeking some loophole of hope.

'Not the slightest doubt, I am afraid,' Mrs. Scarth answered sadly. 'The sketches were most probably done during the long lonely winter which the man must have spent, working at his gold find.'

'But how could he have worked at it in snow? And why did he stay out there in wilderness alone, through all the long months of winter?' demanded Anthony Rawson.

'We don't know why he stayed, or what lived on; you see he was too far gone to us much, and sometimes we thought his mind was wandering,' replied Mrs. Scarth. She muttered a great deal about some place under the hill, where the water came out of a great fissure in the rock, and bits of gold came out with it.'

'They might have been yellow pebbles, all that Cyril would have known to the contrary,' Anthony Rawson said, with his slow smile. 'We used to laugh at him when he was a boy, and tell him it was not all gold that glittered, but he never could be convinced in spite of our efforts. Since I have been hunting for him round in these prospecting camps, I have often thought how Cyril would have been taken in over some of the quartz they have seen.'

'Then you don't think that it was gold which your brother found?' broke in Gretchen.

He shook his head. 'I can't say, of course, but I should doubt it. He had no practical knowledge, such as the ordinary prospector gains before setting out, and he had no scientific lore to help him either. And it seems to me that one of these is an absolute necessity to success.'

Olive nodded acquiescence, because he

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looked to her to support his theory; but her heart grew heavy and cold, for well she knew that her father had neither of these qualifications, and the sadness of his ending out there in the wilderness was more than she could bear to think of.

But it would never do for her to break down and be miserable. The others always seemed to take their cue from her, and if she were sad they would be wretched also. It was more than ever necessary that she should be cheerful to-night, because of the blow that had come to the invalid. He would have nothing to hope for now, and who could tell what the consequences might be?

With Gretchen's help she induced him to go back to the shed and get to bed. They covered him with a big rug, as before, but it was not snowing now; instead the stars sparkled frostily in the clear blue of the sky, and it looked as if the frost were beginning in earnest.

Mrs. Scarth went over to the shed with the girls, and stayed talking in her gentle comforting fashion to the man who had so strangely reached the end of his long quest that night; but Olive and Gretchen went back together, then sat by the stove to brush their hair before going to bed.

'I suppose he will just go and be ill again to-morrow, now that he has found out that it was his brother who died here,' said Gretchen, with a half-resentful nod of her head in the direction of the shed.

'I don't think so. In fact I believe that when the first shock is over, he will get better.'

all the faster for knowing his long hopeless task is at an end,' Olive said, as she drew the brush through and through the shining cloud of her hair with slow steady strokes.

'Do you know what I think?' said Gretchen who was holding her head down and working away at her mop of stiff wiry hair with a much vigour as if she were sweeping a carpet.

'How should I? You have so many thoughts, and some of them are deli htfull original,' Olive answered with a laugh, and never, once guessed how disconcerting Gretchen's next utterance was going to prove.

'I believe that Mr. Rawson is in love with you, but he is such a poor, creaky, invalid sort of person, that if I were you I would think twice about it before I fell in love with him. You are so fine that you ought to marry a real Prince Charming, and not a poor weak creature who has to be dragged back from the grave by sheer force of arm every six months or so.'

'Gretchen, whatever makes you utter such nonsense!' exclaimed Olive; but her face grew crimson, and she was thankful to draw the cloud of her hair over her eyes, to shield herself from her sister's gaze.

'I don't know. I was only impressed by the way he looked at you. But I sincerely hope it is nonsense, for we just can't have you getting married, you know. Here comes mother, and I am going to bed.' Gretchen yawned widely as she rose, but Olive crouched by the stove, trying to quell the riot of emotion the careless words had roused.

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH

The Third and Fourth Fingers

ALTHOUGH there was frost that night there was a blizzard next day, and for a week that sort of thing went on with disconcerting regularity.

Olive would not have minded so much if the blizzards had come at night when it was possible to stay indoors. But in the day there was always the urgent, pressing need to be abroad. Some days, however, in that week of snow-fall it was not possible to be abroad, and business was almost at a standstill.

Anthony Rawson was a prisoner in the shed for nearly the whole of that time. Once only were they able to bring him to the house for supper. He was acutely depressed by the knowledge of his brother's death, upon which he had stumbled in such an unexpected fashion, thanks to Bluey.

It would not have occurred to any of them to connect the nameless stranger with Anthony Rawson's prodigal brother, but for that likeness; yet when once the resemblance had been noticed, and the sketch-book put into Mr. Rawson's hands, he himself was able to identify several of the sketches as having been made from bits of scenery about his old home.

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The patience he had displayed in his search stood him in good stead now. As he faced his grief with the same fortitude that he had brought to bear upon the following clues which always ended in disappointment. Only the trouble was that he had so little bodily strength to stand up against it.

After a week of snow-storms, the weather cleared, becoming gloriously fine. There was bright sunshine, clear skies, and sparkling frost, with such exhilaration in the air that the hardest toil became a pleasure.

Olive was abroad before the sun got up. She had packed the sledge on the previous evening in the hope of better weather, and now that it had come, she was minded to lose no time in going the round of her customers, some of whom must be very badly off for the common necessaries by this time.

From dawning right on until past noon she was going from house to house down creek side, even venturing across the frozen water to carry provisions to the scattered residents on the further shore. When she came back between one and two o'clock, she looked so tired that Mrs. Scarth besought her not to go out again.

'I'm so hungry, there is nothing else the matter with me,' she said, dropping down upon the settle for a brief rest, whilst Gretchen dished up a savoury stew for the midday meal of which to-day they stood urgently in need.

'And isn't that matter enough, Miss Olive?' asked a quiet voice behind her; and turning

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quick surprise she saw that Anthony Rawson was standing close beside her.

'Did you walk in from the shed?' she asked in quick surprise.

'Yes, why not? I have left off being an invalid, and to-morrow I am going to start on doing chores,' he said, with a swagger of robustness which made them all laugh.

'I don't think you are fit for chores for a few days; but if you could help with the booking, it would be an immense boon,' Olive said, with a frank acceptance of proffered assistance, very soothing to the man whose load of obligation was so heavy.

'I will do it all, if I may. Why didn't you ask me before?' he demanded, with boyish eagerness.

'Because you were not fit to do it, I expect; at least I never thought of asking you,' she replied, laughing; 'but it will be delightful not to be compelled to sit writing when I come in this evening. I love to sew when I am tired with all the work of the day, but even the sight of a pen fills me with loathing then, so plainly I am not a literary character, or else it must be that I have a soul above entries of bacon, lard, flour, sugar and tea.'

'I should think that you would be too tired even to sew when your day's work is done,' he said, as he turned his attention towards helping Gretchen lay the table.

'Oh, I love to have a bit of ... work then,' she went on, leaning back on the settle with an air of luxurious ease. 'Don't you see, it is my

hold-fast to femininity, to use needle and cott when my day's work is done, and of choi when the mending 'not pressing, I do son thing that is useles. and futile. All over t world women are revolting against woma work, despising the needle, and all the hom old-fashioned activities in which our gra mothers and great-grandmothers used to glo but if those same women had to go af in all weathers, and to do hard toils tasks from morning until night, they wo go back to the crochet, knitting and samp quickly enough.'

'I doubt it,' he answered, shaking his he 'The modern woman, even when she is a girl, is much too sensible to waste year valuable life in embroidering impossible st and six-legged lions on canvas. But must go another journey again to-day? You v away before daylight, I believe.'

'A few more miles won't hurt me,' she s eating with the appetite and keen apprecia of food which only the hard toiler really kn

'Where have you to go, Olive?' asked Scarth anxiously.

'I must make my way up the Dease W trail, to the place where the Shindlers l settled, mother. No one has been down days, and they must be in rather a poor pl I fancy. I shall take flour, meal, bacon that sort of thing,' Olive answered.

'Why don't these people come and their own purchases?' asked Anthony L son. 'I don't see that you should go s

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shoeing miles and miles, facing all sorts of weather, and dangers too, for the sake of supplying them with tea and tobacco.'

'It is business, I suppose, and I want all the trade I can get,' Olive said brightly; 'and in the case of the Shindlers it may be urgently necessary for someone to go. The man suffers very much from rheumatism, and some days is so lame that he can hardly get about at all. Mrs. Shindler cannot walk on snow-shoes, they have no hired help, and so it is plainly the duty of someone to go and see how they are faring.'

'A few days more, and I shall be able to go with you, I hope, for I am rather a dab at snow-shoeing. Perhaps I could manage it this afternoon if it is not too far,' Anthony Rawson said, moving about the small room with the restless air of a man who has been long shut up against his will.

'Oh, no, no; it is not to be thought of!' exclaimed Mrs. Scarth, in alarm.

'Don't worry, mother; we do not allow convalescent invalids to do foolhardy things in this establishment,' laughed Olive; and then when she had rested and fed, she prepared to set out on her journey, which was really as much an errand of charity as of business.

Gretchen came out to the store and helped her pack some more things on to the sledge, and Olive exclaimed in surprise at the tidiness of the place, which she had left in a fearful muddle in the morning.

'Mr. Rawson has been out here helping me,'

said Gretchen; 'he says that he means to work every day now while he stays here. Shan't we miss him dreadfully when he goes away ?'

'When is he going ?' asked Olive, looking up quickly, and with more consternation in her eyes than she knew or guessed.

'I don't know. Indeed, he does not know himself until letters come from England, and they may be a good while on the road at this time of the year,' Gretchen said, turning her head away so that she might not seem to be scanning Olive's tell-tale face. 'He told mother yesterday that even though his aunts had cast him off, he could claim enough from his uncle's executors to pay for his board, lodging and nursing all these weeks. But of course mother said she wouldn't take the money. Oh, dear, why are people so dreadfully proud when they are poor ? I do want a new frock so badly and think of the books his board-money would buy ! Oh, do make mother take it, then we shall feel almost rich !'

For once, however, Olive was neither responsive nor practical. 'No, no, Gretchen, we could not take money from him; of course it is not to be thought of,' she said in some confusion; then she hurriedly finished her packing and prepared to start.

'Well, well, here is a pretty state of things' muttered Gretchen, turning round and facing a grinning advertisement of Monkey Brand soap, as if the impish-looking monkey-man were her closest confidant. 'Here is Olive the level-headed, losing her heart over the

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tiresome man, who has been the torment of our lives all these weeks, and now she will be as proud and independent as Dora, or perhaps even worse! Bah, I've no patience with people who won't take money for their work. I mean to take it myself, when I get a chance, or else I won't do the work. For why in the name of common sense should we toil ourselves to skin and bone, deny ourselves every pleasant thing in life, for the sake of an utter stranger, and then refuse to take that stranger's money, when he can well afford to pay. Now, I ask, why should we?

But the monkey-man only grinned at his reflection in the frying-pan in the advertisement picture, and answered nothing at all.

Meanwhile Olive was skimming along the Dease Water trail, dragging the sledge behind her, intent on getting her journey over as quickly as possible. She was angry with herself for having been so upset about Gretchen's tidings. Of course Mr. Rawson would go away as soon as a belated mail brought him money for his journey, and the episode of his long stay with them would be over. He had been so very ill that it would be only natural to miss him a little. But as to taking money from him to pay for the trouble he had given, it was not to be thought of, not for a moment.

It was true what Gretchen said: at this moment, Olive was as proud or even prouder than Dora, and as fiercely resentful at the thought of being paid for her work. She

was a real Scarth at the bottom, with her share of the family pride in generous measure, only hitherto she had been influenced by the necessity of doing her very best for other people, and so the pride had been thrust into the background.

Inwardly fuming, but outwardly serene and alert, she had got over more than half the distance, when she saw a figure rapidly approaching through a break in the black clustering pine trees—the very spot where she had seen her father disappear.

For one wild, heart-sick moment she gazed at the swiftly-moving figure in a tumult of mingled hope, apprehension and despair. Then coming to a stand, she waited for the traveller to approach.

He was an Indian—that she had seen at a second glance, and it flashed upon her all at once that he might be an emissary of Jules Webling.

Somehow the heart in her grew cold and hard as she waited. She was not sweet and forgiving like Dora, who had so far put malice and uncharitableness away from her, as to be anxious that the enemy who had stolen the letter and dogged their father's way in the wilderness, should be rescued from the position in which his craft had placed him.

The Indian might have been own brother to the husband of Mrs. Tall Pine by the look of him; evidently he belonged to the same tribe and had the same propensity for begging.

'Have pity, merciful white trader. Have

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pity on the sick and poor ! ' he began in slow set speech, his English being so much more easy of understanding than she had expected that she said quickly—

‘ Who are you ? Where have you come from ? ’

‘ A white man is sick in the land beyond the great morasses ; he has not long to live, and he yearns for tea, for sugar, and terbacker.’ The red man brought out the last words with such a snap of his jaws that she could not help smiling, for well she guessed that the tobacco

s not for the sick man, but for this ambassador of his who had ventured so near to civilization.

‘ But if I give you these things, what have you to give me in return ? ’ she asked. A little shiver crept over her as she spoke, for well she realized that if the Indian chose to take what he wanted by force, she could hardly withstand him, seeing that he was a powerful man, and she only a girl.

But his intentions were plainly without guile ; he whined a great deal, held out his hands in imploring fashion, and appealed to her pity.

‘ The white man is sick, he is sure to die ; white men always die when they are sick ; but he is hungry for the things of his own, the food and the drink which are not bark and melted snow water, or even the flesh of moose and caribou dried by greenwood smoke. Give, give, white trader, give, for I also have for to trade,’ he said, dragging at his garment of skin, as if to show that he had some treasure there.

‘ What is your trade ? ’ she asked, more for

the sake of seeing what it was he had to give than from any real intention of withholding what was necessary.

The fellow produced a tiny bag of deerskin, beautifully embroidered with porcupine quills—an article which a collector would have raved over—and without a word he laid it in Olive's hand, then pointed to the sledge, as if eager to help himself and be gone.

But there was something in the bag, and she drew it out with fingers which trembled so much that she nearly dropped bag and all upon the snow.

Then a cry of amazement broke from her. It was a lady's ring that she had pulled out of the bag, a little gold ring with two hands clasped and inside the words 'Until death.' A shudder shook her then, for this was the ring which Jules Webling had begged her to accept and wear, that time at Redway Falls, when he had asked her to marry him. A wave of repulsion had swept over her then, and the same feeling was upon her now. She wanted to take the ring and the bag, and thrust them into the hand of the solemn savage, then hurry away to try and forget all about it.

But she must not yield to her feeling; it was better to trade than to encourage begging which to the Indian was always next door to thievery. So she spread the cover of her sledge upon the snow, laid the ring and the embroidered bag upon it at one end, and at the other a little pile of groceries, tea, sugar, cocoa, a packet of oatmeal and some tobacco.

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The Indian's stolid face took on an eager gleam at the sight of the tobacco, but he never moved or spoke as Olive hunted through her goods, to see what else there was which she might spare out of sheer goodwill towards the succour of her father's enemy. Then she came upon a small tin of biscuits, which she had intended as a present for Mrs. Shindler, who had been very kind to them when she lived in Orsay village. Mrs. Shindler must wait until next time for the little gift, so Olive decided. And she laid the package in the trade lump intimating that it was a gift, and also her last word with regard to trade.

'Ugh, ugh, ugh!' grunted the red man, in what sounded like severe disapproval, but was in reality high satisfaction. Then as Olive picked up the bag with the ring, and drew back, he came nearer, and stooping down began to stow the stores in a wolf-skin bag, which he afterwards slung on his back, as a squaw would sling a papoose bag. Then with another series of grunts, which might mean anything or nothing, he slipped his moccasined feet into the straps of his snow-shoes, and made off back by the way he had come, at a pace which reduced Olive to envy and jealousy.

'If I could only go like that!' she muttered, as she watched him skimming across the snow. 'I'm pretty good for an amateur, but one has to be born and brought up in the snow to do justice to snow-shoes, and English snowfall as a rule is much more heavy or diffi-

cult to deal with than Canadian hoarfrost so how can the English-born even hope to expect to excel at that sort of thing ?'

She laughed to herself as she set out again to finish her journey. Her heart was lighter now than for many a long day; she had done her best to send succour to the man who had tried to rob her father; and now that she knew he was actually there, she would also do her best to send a party to his help.

It was such a relief that the worrying mysteries of the past few months were wearing themselves threadbare. Nothing of course could bring her dear father to life; but Jules Webling was not responsible for his death, and it might have even been a comfort to her father to have had a companion during those weeks of hunting for gold, before he started to return in the canoe.

The Shindlers were tremendously glad to see her. It was as she had imagined; the man was invalided from rheumatism, and the woman could not stir ten strides on snow-shoes. A hired man was what they needed and although they could ill afford the expense they besought Clive to find someone who would be glad to live with them for his board until the winter was past, or poor Shindler's rheumatism was better.

They told her that the Indian had been to them begging for sick-white-man's-food, but their stores were so low that they had nothing to give him and had sent him on to Orsay telling him that he would probably meet the

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trader coming up, and that would save him a little distance.

Olive stayed with them as long as she dared. She milked the cow and did chores for Mrs. Shindler, who was grateful to the verge of tears. And then just as a young moon appeared like a sickle of silver in the clear sky over the gloomy black forests, she set out on her homeward journey. Four miles of racing on snow-shoes with the empty sledge flying along behind her would have been pure enjoyment, despite the fatigue of her long day's work, if she had not been so desperately afraid of wolves.

Rob Shindler said that he had heard wolves howling round the lonely little shack, in the long nights when his rheumatism would not let him sleep, and so Olive took on a panic and scared herself horribly all the way home, where she arrived bathed in perspiration, and trembling with the haste she had made.

Gretchen and Mr. Rawson had locked up the store for the night, all the chores were done, and supper was ready. Then there would be the long cosy evening round the stove, the mere thought of which cheered Olive, as she toiled through her multifarious tasks in the keen cold air.

She even found time this evening to run into her bedroom and tidy her hair. Then she slipped on a white woollen blouse, to replace the old blue jersey that she had worn all day. A sob came up in her throat as she looked at herself in the glass; it was black

she ought to be wearing for her father, but she could not bear to do it, even though she knew that hope for him was at an end.

When supper was over and Gretchen was clearing the dishes, while Anthony Rawson proceeded to finish the bookending under Olive's direction, she drew out the little embroidery bag which she had received from the Indians and called upon them to admire it.

'What is there inside?' asked Mrs. Scarth when Olive told the story of how she had sent succour to Jules Webling, who was sick and wanted.

'A ring,' said Olive, and to her utter disgust she blushed red as a peony, right up to the roots of her hair, while Gretchen stared at her in blank surprise, and Mrs. Scarth looked mildly disturbed.

'Whose ring?' demanded Gretchen, who had left her dishes and was standing close to Olive, holding the ring on the palm of her hand.

'It is Jules Webling's ring; I have seen it in his possession,' Olive said faintly.

'Pardon me, it was my mother's betrothal ring; inside there is the motto, "Until death do we part." Cyril had it and always wore it. He must have given it to that man Jules Webling,' broke in the voice of Anthony Rawson, with a rasp of anger; then he asked, 'Did Webling wear it?'

'I never saw him wear it,' said Olive. 'It is rather small, you see; then he had only three and fourth fingers on his left hand, while the right was enlarged at the joints.'

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'The third and fourth fingers on his left hand,' repeated Anthony Rawson in a musing tone, as if he were thinking hard, 'why that poor dead man in the canoe had lost the third and fourth fingers of his left hand.'

'What? What? What?' shrieked Olive, jumping up in such violent haste that she nearly knocked the table over.

'My dear Olive!' Mrs. Scarth began, but Olive only shrieked again—

'Can't you see? It was Jules Webling who died, and—and it is father who is alive, in the care of the Indians!'

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST

Olive's Desperate Undertaking

GRETCHEN screamed in a sort of unbelieving ecstasy, while Bluey and Benny, who had been doing fretwork in the corner, jumped up to know what all the commotion was about.

Mr. Scarth had risen to her feet and stood leaning against the table, swaying to and fro, while her face was as white as a sheet.

Then Olive turned upon Anthony Rawson, her eyes blazing, her breath coming in short gasps. 'Why, why, did you not tell us before that—that the body had lost the third and fourth fingers of the left hand?' she cried, stamping her foot on the floor as if to hasten his reply.

'Because I never thought of it,' he answered simply. 'I noted the fact at the time, but suppose the long weeks of sickness drove it out of my mind. And then you were all so sure it was your father that I did not rack my brains as I might have done for a means of identification.'

'Mother, mother, dear father is alive! He is alive, do you hear!' cried Olive, flinging her arms about her mother with a glad shout of joyful exultation, while Bluey and Benny burst into ringing 'hurrahs, and Gretchen

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executed a festive toe-and-heel dance in the corner of the kitchen where the wood-basket stood.

Anthony Rawson stared at them in amazement. Ever since he had known them they had lived under the shadow of heavy trouble, when the young ones had been subdued and Mrs. Scarth had been a picture of drooping resignation.

But for five minutes they were like a set of irresponsible school-children just broken out of durance, and not even Bluey and Benny could equal Olive, her mother, and Gretchen, who, clasped in each other's arms, swayed to and fro, laughing, chuckling, gasping, as the black shadow lifted from their hearts, and hope flashed a golden radiance through the gloom.

It was Mrs. Scarth, for a wonder, who first came back to the realities of the situation, and with the flush of renewed hope dying out of her worn face, she cried out with a wail of utter misery in her tone, 'But Olive, he is ill, he may die; don't you remember the Indian said so? Oh, my dears, I must go to him, for I cannot bear my life any longer apart from my husband!'

'You can't go, mother sweet, it is too far. Three days on snow-shoes beyond the great morasses,' said Olive, her voice very tender and pitiful, as she rocked her mother to and fro in her arms; then she burst out in a jubilant shout. 'But I will go to father, mother darling, and when he is well enough I will bring him home, home, home! I will bring

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him home, do you hear? And we will all be as happy as we were in the days of long ago!

' My dear, you could not do a journey like that, it is unthinkable for a young girl; think of the nights in the open ! ' wailed Mrs. Scarth while Gretchen began to cry and the two younger children fairly howled.

But Olive was already struggling into her big coat and winding a woollen muffler round and round her head, while she issued short orders in the tone of one who means to be obeyed.

' Put on a coat, Gretchen, and come to help me get the canoe out of the store. I am going to put it on the sledge and drag it down to Roland Herne's place. He is in bed with frightfully bad cold, but he has got to get up and put sledge-runners on the canoe for me, and have it up here two hours before dawn. For I mean to start at daylight, and go to bring father home.

' Olive, you can't do a journey like that alone ! ' wailed Mrs. Scarth; but Gretchen with a set white face flew to obey her sister's commands. Olive would be sure to find a way out of the trouble, was her unspoken thought, and she must be ready herself for everything that was required of her.

' I shall not go alone, mother; I am going to hire Mrs. Tall Pine and her husband to escort me. They will travel over the snow better than white people, and I shall have the advantage of a woman's company, even though she is only a red one.'

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'Couldn't you get that man from Alaska to go with you as well?' asked Gretchen, who was dragging on her outdoor clothes while Olive lighted a lantern.

'No use; he started for Wernside this morning,' Olive answered, 'and I would rather have his room than his company anyhow. No, no, Mr. Rawson, it is not to be thought of,' she broke off with a tremor in her voice, as the young man approached her, with the look on his face which showed that he meant to go also.

'Why not?' he asked, his voice almost savage, for as he told himself, this stupendous blunder had all been of his making, and he just meant to take his share in rectifying it.

Moved quite out of herself by the revelation of the evening and lifted above any thought of self-consciousness, Olive laid a trembling hand on his arm, and looked into his face, talking to him as she might have done if the secret of his heart had already been expressed in plain speech between them: 'Mr. Rawson, for my sake you will not even want to go with me. Even if you were in perfect health, the journey would be a trial as you have had no practice on snow-shoes this winter. Then how could I leave mother and the children, even for a week, if you were not here to look after them? The Indians will take good care of me, for remember I saved them from a horrible lingering death, and they will not forget.'

His face clouded. It is hard for a man to stand back and let a girl do a thing so desperate

as this journey which Olive proposed to undertake. But it was especially trying for him because he loved her, and no man can calmly bear to be written down for a weakling, even in a temporary sense, by the girl he yearns to protect and care for.

'Why need you go at all?' he burst out.
'Give me the map and an Indian, and I will go and bring your father home for you!'

'I know you would,' she answered, and there were tears in her eyes which she could not brush away, for he was holding both her hands clasped in his and looking at her with his secret written in big capitals all across his face.
'But don't you see it is father, my dear father, who is ill in the wilderness, and he will long more than anything else for a sight of one of his own. Mother cannot possibly go, Dorcas is not here, Gretchen is too young, so I must go. And oh, do make it easy for me to go, please, please!'

His hands took a harder grip of hers, until the pressure fairly hurt her, and his voice was hoarse as he said, 'Trust me, I will do what I can.'

'Oh, Mr. Rawson, do you think she ought to be allowed to go?' sobbed Mrs. Scarth.

'I am afraid she must. Indeed, I see no other way,' he answered gloomily; but he still kept hold of Olive's hands, and now he pushed her gently down on to the settle, saying quietly, 'Now, Miss Scarth, if you are going to start at dawn, you must go to bed at once and leave the rest to us. I will see the Indian

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and arrange terms with them. I will also help Roland Herne, and we will get the runners on the canoe, then your mother and Miss Gretchen will help me to pack it for the journey.'

'But there are so many things I must see to—invalid comforts for father, and that sort of thing,' she protested, her hands fluttering restlessly in his grasp, as if she were fighting against the mastery in his tone and touch.

'There is nothing at all that you will be allowed to do to-night, if you wish to start in the morning,' he answered; then he looked across to Mrs. Scarth, who was leaning over the table laughing and crying by turns: 'Will you join your authority to mine in insisting that Miss Scarth shall go to bed?'

'Yes; yes, Olive dear, don't be obstinate; remember that it is your father's one chance of life that you may be risking!' the mother said, coming round the table and plucking at Olive's sleeve in an imploring fashion.

'I will go to bed. Only please, please, have everything ready,' she said, speaking to her mother, but looking at Anthony Rawson.

He dropped her hands at once, and there was that in his smile that set her heart beating faster; it was as if she had given something away that she could never recall, and she had yielded meekly to a will that was stronger than her own.

Mrs. Scarth and Bluey hustled her off to bed, undressing her as if she were a baby, in spite of her protestations that she was quite able to look after herself.

'Oh, Bluey, she is so cold, it will take her so long to go to sleep!' cried Mrs. Scarth, as she chafed Olive's feet with her trembling hands.

'I'll get into bed and warm her, mother that will make her go to sleep quickly,' said the little girl, crawling in at the lower end of the bed, and taking Olive's feet under her care. Then she added briskly, 'When she is nicely asleep, I'll come back to the kitchen and help you pack the things for father. I shall just love to be up all night.'

Mrs. Scarth nodded and went away, but when she looked in half an hour later, both Olive and Bluey lay wrapped in profound slumber, and she withdrew as noiselessly as she had come.

Meanwhile Anthony Rawson and Gretchen had gone to the store, and had hauled the canoe out of the corner in which it had been stowed; then they emptied it of the miscellaneous assortment of all sorts of rubbish which had been stowed away in it.

'Is the map here?' asked Anthony, as he turned over the cheap literature which it had at first been supposed belonged to him.

'No, Olive keeps it indoors in her writing case,' Gretchen answered, and then they worked away in silence again until the canoe was empty, when they dragged it across the floor and lifted it on to the sledge.

'I can manage alone now,' said the man, as he strained and tugged at the sledge until it moved easily forward. He was not on snow-shoes, but had slipped his feet through the straps,

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fixed on to a couple of bits of square board, much used in the Stikine country, and known as snow-pattens.

'But I ought to go with you, for Mr. Herne may want some help as he is ill, and I can carpenter a little,' Gretchen said, torn in two as to her duty at that moment. She knew how much her mother would be needing her indoors, and yet if the sledge-runners were not fixed on the canoe by morning, Olive would not be able to start.

'I can carpenter a little also, and I shall bring the sledge back up to time, trust me,' Anthony said, moving off with his load, his pattens being soundless on the snowy trail; and then he called back, 'And I will have the Indians up to time too, if I have to drag them up the hill by their hair.'

Gretchen gurgled hysterically and disappeared into the house, while Anthony plunged forward, breathing heavily, handicapped by his weakness, which was greater than he could admit even to himself. What a wreck he was! Fancy a man being compelled to sit at home like a tame spaniel, while a girl faced a three days' journey on snow-shoes! It is safe to say that Anthony Rawson had never loathed himself in his life as he loathed himself that night. Several times on his way down to Roland Herne's house he nearly fell in the snow from sheer lack of strength, but always he caught himself up with savage anger at his own impotence, and pushed onward, determined not to be beaten—no, not if he died in the effort.

Roland Herne was in bed, taking the best care he could of a very bad cold, and at first he declared that he would not open the door to anyone, not even the King of England.

'Perhaps not. But you'll open to one of his humble subjects, or else I'll kick the door down!' shouted Anthony, making such tremendous onslaught upon the flimsy door that in self-protection Roland Herne was forced to rise and let him in.

'It is never you, Rawson?' he exclaimed, Anthony, tugging and struggling with his load got it inside the door. 'Why, man, you must be mad to be abroad in this cold! It is freezing just shocking, and you are not half strong yet!'

'I'm all right!' retorted Anthony brusquely; he was dreadfully sensitive on the score of his infirmities to-night. 'But see, you've got to get dressed and set to work fixing sledges runners on the canoe, the same way that poor Scarth had them put on before he started on that journey of his in the spring.'

'I'll do it to-morrow, if I'm fit, but I'm not going to risk catching my death of cold to-night, I can tell you,' replied Roland.

'You will do it to-night, and you'll start once,' said Anthony, in a voice of so much authority that the other was too astonished for resentment. 'I will come and help you presently, but first I've got to go and rout out that Indian and his squaw, and have them ready to take the trail at dawn.'

'Look here, what's up? And where is the

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need of all this hurry ?' burst out Roland Herne, laying forcible hands on Anthony, and dragging him nearer to the stove, which glowed dull red, the only light in the dark little house.

In a few breathless words Anthony told of Olive's discovery that her father must be still alive, but lying ill somewhere in the snowy wastes beyond the great morasses, and her determination to go to his succour at once.

' But she can't. Why, it is stark, staring madness ! A girl to go a three days' journey over the snow—why, she will have to sleep in it ! ' exclaimed Roland, staring at Anthony as if he thought a fit of delirium was upon him.

' Not if the canoe is ready. She can curl up in that, don't you see ? But hurry, man, for she will go with only the sledge if the canoe is not ready. I've got to rouse the Indians, and see that they are up to time. Oh, and I want to know is there anywhere in Orsay where a team of dogs can be hired ? '

' The only dogs in the township are the four belonging to Sol Fry. But he won't let you have them at any price, trust him for that ! he hates you worse than poison, because you were taken worse in the nick of time to save me my bet,' and Roland went off in an explosion of laughter at the remembrance, then coughed until he was black in the face, and looked as if he were on the verge of being choked.

' What's to be done ? ' queried Anthony

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anxiously. 'Of course Miss Scarth thinks she is going to tow the canoe all that way, with the help of the Indians. But think for yourself how much easier it will be with a dog team.'

'Tell the Indians to arrange about the dogs and don't ask any questions about how they do it,' suggested Roland. 'It is that man Jerry, I suppose you mean, with the squaw Tall Pine. Well, that fellow is downright clever with dogs, and he is honest enough in his dealings with the person that pays him, so Miss Scarth will be all right with him and his squaw. You will have to pay him well, and you had better promise something extra over and above, if the expedition comes back all right. How will you manage about money? I'm pretty near cleared out, or I'd help gladly enough, for Scarth was a good sort, and I'd be thankful to see him back alive.'

'I can manage the money,' said Anthony shortly, and for the first time since he had heard of his brother's death, a ray of gladness stole into his heart. By the terms of Uncle Charlie's will, if Cyril died Anthony inherited the modest competence the old man had left. So although his aunts might cast him off because of the way in which he had wrecked his career to hunt for his erring brother, he would still be able to pay handsomely for all the care that had been so freely given him during his long sickness.

It was true Mrs. Scarth had refused to allow him even to mention money. But there were

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other ways, apart from direct payment, by which indebtedness might be acknowledged, and Anthony chuckled to himself as he strode through the snow on his pattens, to think that he could start on the paying that very night.

The Indians had taken temporary possession of a small apartment in the framework of the hotel, and were burning good building timber to keep their fire going. But as it was no one's business to interfere, they remained unmolested and very well pleased with their winter quarters.

Apparently they had turned in for the night and had to be routed out by the same methods by which Roland Herne had been roused, only more strenuous ones. The door of their abode did really fly into splinters before Jerry rose in his wrath to kick the intruder out.

But in his wanderings to and fro, Anthony had had to deal with Indians before, and he knew very well how to set about his task.

Miss Scarth was to be conducted in safety to the wigwams of Jerry's tribe, or wherever else it was that the sick white man was being cared for. So much in money, in provisions, and tobacco was to be paid for this; so much more if the intrepid white girl were brought back in safety and comfort. The Indian had grunted with satisfaction, for the white man's terms were liberal and there need be no more pinching in his lot while the snow lasted. Then Anthony turned back, as if struck by a sudden thought.

' You have dogs ? ' he asked.

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The Indian grunted, and suggested that dogs were expensive.

'But you could not expect the white girl to tug her own canoe?' and Anthony looked so aghast at the bare idea that for one long anxious moment Jerry and Tall Pine thought the bargain was off.

'Dogs hard to get in Orsay,' the Indian said, permitting himself a shake of the head, though as a rule he deemed it beneath his duty to express any feeling whatever on the subject he might have to discuss.

'But it is not impossible to get them, and see here.' As he spoke Anthony edged closer to the red man, and said something too low for the squaw to hear. He was doubling the money he had offered for a safe return, but he did not want the woman to hear, for he guessed that she would tell Olive in some moment of expansiveness, and he did not want her to feel embarrassed by the manner in which he was trying to safeguard her comfort.

'The dogs shall wait for the white girl dawn,' announced Jerry solemnly, and Anthony went away confident that by some means another the miracle would be accomplished.

All through the night he and Roland Heron toiled at turning the canoe into a light-running sledge once more. Roland was desperately ill. Sometimes a fit of coughing shook him badly that he was forced to drop exhausted on a bench, or it was fierce pain which made the perspiration start out upon his forehead, but he held to his task with the dogged obstinacy

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of one who will succeed in spite of fate, and two hours before the coming of the slow dawn the task was done.

By this time Anthony was almost as spent as Roland, but like him he was resolute not to give way until the need for holding up was over.

'Now I will drag the concern up the hill to Mrs. Scarth's and help to pack it for the journey,' he said, struggling into his overcoat, and wrapping a woollen scarf round his head, for it was freezing harder than ever.

'You'll never get that thing up the hill alone; I'll come and help,' said Roland hoarsely.

'No, no, you don't stir outside, if I know anything about it. Why, man, it would half kill you,' exclaimed Anthony; and then putting his head out of the door, he listened for a moment and then broke into a chuckle of delight.

'Listen to that!' he said, and across the tense stillness of the dark morning came the delighted yap of a big dog released from durance.

'Dogs? How on earth did you manage to square Sol Fry?' demanded Roland huskily; then he backed from the door, because the cold seemed to stab him like a knife stuck into his lungs.

'I didn't square him, I have not been near him, I don't even know that these are his dogs. I told Jerry to get dogs and he has done it, that is all.'

'He—he—he, ha—ha!' laughed Roland,

breaking into an explosion of coughing; then as soon as he had breath enough to speak, he said between his fits of choking, ' You'd better not ask how he managed the business, nor that you have any scruples about honesty, or that sort of thing.'

' Jerry is quite capable of managing his own affairs, at least for to-day,' Anthony answered then as the Indian came past the door with four great dogs leaping about him, Anthony called to him, the dogs were promptly harnessed to the sledge, and then they swept it up the hill in racing style.

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CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND

Wilderness Perils

THERE was a feeling of dazed unreality about Olive when she woke in the cold dawning, and remembered that she was to start off to find her father. Despite her refusal to admit it openly, she had begun to believe that he was dead. And the shock of last night's discovery seemed to have stunned her. She could think and plan what was best to be done, but she had lost for a little while the power to feel acutely. There was no keen joy in her heart, no riotous elation, only the determination to get the journey done with as little delay as possible, and to get her father home inside of a week, if she could manage it.

Perhaps it was the knowledge of his being ill which had the sobering effect upon her; she could not be glad because she had the fear in her heart that she might arrive too late.

The same dread was overshadowing Mrs. Scarth, and coming into the room just as Olive finished dressing, she took both her daughter's hands in her own trembling ones, saying earnestly, 'Promise me, child, that you will bring your father back to me alive—or dead.'

'If I can find him, mother, I will bring him home to you, alive—or dead,' Olive answered,

and her tone was as if she were uttering a vow. Then she asked eagerly, 'Did it snow at all last night, do you know ?'

'No, it was brilliant starlight when the moon went down, and it is a fine morning,' Mrs. Scarth replied, with more courage in her tone now that Olive had given the promise for which she asked.

Just then an outburst of barking sounded near at hand; Bluey rushed out to see what all the noise was about, but Olive turned to her mother with a startled look. 'Dogs? Mother, where did they come from ?'

'The Indian Jerry brought them; he said it was part of his contract with Mr. Rawson, whom he calls the "sick-man-chief," but I'm afraid they will cost a lot, dear, because of their food,' said Mrs. Scarth, who was trying to help Olive, but hindering more than she helped.

'Never mind, it is for father you know, and we must manage to meet it somehow,' Olive said, stooping to kiss her mother; then she hurried to the outer room to eat her breakfast, standing, in a wild confusion of last preparations.

Gretchen, looking haggard and dishevelled with her night of hard work, was darting to and fro, doing this thing and that, but she stopped presently to ask Olive if she had the route map safe.

'Yes, dear, I have it here,' and Olive tapped the front of her coat. Then she went on eagerly, 'But I shall not want it, if no snow

falls for the next few days, because I shall follow the tracks of the man who begged of me yesterday; he is sure to go straight, and we may save a lot of time that way.'

'What a good idea! I had not thought of that,' exclaimed Gretchen, a gleam of hope coming into her tired eyes.

Then Bluey came rushing into the house, crying out in delight, 'Oh, Olive, Olive, they are old Sol Fry's dogs, beauties they are, and Judy, the big yellow and white one, knows me, I am sure of it!'

'I wonder——' began Olive, then pulled herself up short. Perhaps after all it was as well not to speculate on the means the Indian had used to make Sol Fry willing to lend his dogs.

She was ready to start now; and with hurried farewells, she went out of the door to slip on her snow-shoes, just as Anthony Rawson, looking pinched and white in the half light, came hurrying down from the store where he had been serving a very early customer.

'Why don't you ride for the first few miles? The dogs can quite manage your weight,' he said, stooping to straighten the lacing of Olive's left framework.

'I should get so cold,' she answered; then moved by a sudden impulse, she held out her hand to him. 'Thank you for all you did for me last night. I am quite sure I owe the dogs to your statesmanship, and they will make all the difference to the comfort of my journey.'

He took her hand, and for a moment held it fast, but not a word could he say; it was

as if he were suddenly tongue-tied. Then dropping it, he stepped into the background, and Olive was off, gliding in front at a great rate, while Jerry with the dogs and the canoe-sledge came behind, and Mrs. Tall Pine in her very gaudiest finery brought up the rear.

Olive was nervously anxious to forge ahead, and went forward as fast as she could manage to get along, though there is an old Indian adage to the effect that he who would go fast must start slow. Some intuition told her that if she delayed at the beginning her journey might be seriously hindered.

She picked up the tracks of the man at the point where he had left her yesterday, and following it closely was soon out on the vast wide plains, which in summer were impassable swamps, the impregnable fortress of great flocks of water-fowl. But now there was not a sign of life in all the wide desolate region.

Olive was anxious. Would they manage to cross it before nightfall, she wondered. Then she worried herself in speculations as to how they would manage a night camp in such a spot, if it began to blow a blizzard.

The short day was already closing down; they had had only two brief resting spells of half an hour each since the start, and Olive at least was growing tired, although neither Mrs. Tall Pine nor the dogs seemed much the worse for wear.

The trail they were following held on without any appearance of the man having stopped; and presently when the darkness dropped

deeper, Olive paused to consult with Jerry about a camping place for the night.

'No stay here, bad camp!' he said, with a shake of his head at the flat wide plain. 'One hour more, then hills an' trees, we camp there.'

One hour more! Could they all hold out so long? Judging by herself, Olive thought not, but she was not going to say so yet, and forged grimly ahead, every bone in her body aching from the strain of the long journey.

Although night had fallen, it was still light enough for them to see the trail ahead of them across the snow; the man who had begged had not halted, from which Olive gathered that he must have been driving to reach some camping-place farther on.

Presently she saw ahead a deeper line of gloom close to the snow-covered earth, and looking back at the Indian, she threw out her arm and shouted, 'What is it?'

'Trees!' announced Jerry in a laconic tone, then snapped his long whip at the dogs, urging them forward.

But the animals had seen the dark line too, and instinct telling them that was where the night camp would be, they started off at a wild gallop, hurtling themselves forward over the hard frozen snow, until it was as much as Olive could do to keep in front of them.

The trees were very close now, abrupt hills clad from base to summit with dreary rows of pine trees and scrubby larch wood; then the trail turned sharply to the left, and a

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moment later Olive was close to a temporary shelter, half-igloo or dug-out, and half pine boughs heaped with snow.

'Shall we camp?' she asked, turning to Jerry, who was close behind with the dogs.

'Ugh! 'Ver good camp Indian made it!' he snorted, in a high state of satisfaction with himself and everyone else.

Then Mrs. Tall Pine glided up, and stepping off her snow-shoes, proceeded to investigate the igloo, which she declared to be 'ver' good, although Olive turned away in disgust because it smelt so horrible and looked such a dirty hole inside.

First the dogs were given their supper and left to their own devices, except that they were tethered in a bunch. When they had finished eating, each dog commenced to dig a hole for itself, working with desperate, frantic haste, and raising such a cloud of snow that when all four were digging and kicking at once the flurry was so great, as to look like a small snow-storm. Then each dog with some growling and barking and a little fighting to settle differences of opinion as between friends, curled itself into the hole which had been kicked out, and was immediately warm and comfortable for the night.

Olive cooked her own supper, while Jerry and Mrs. Tall Pine banked the canoe with snow. They had run it in close beside the igloo, so that she would not be lonely or afraid in the long dark night. But they left her a hole by which to crawl in, so small that entrance to her

sleeping apartment became something of a feat.

Roland Herne had fixed a little tent of sailcloth over the canoe, and when this was heaped with snow she was as cosy and secure as if she had been sleeping under a roof. Of course fastidious people might have objected to having one's pantry for a pillow; but travellers across the snow do not dare to be particular, and when Olive squirmed into her sleeping sack, she had a lump of bacon and a bag of beans at her feet, while her head rested on the bread sack, and other provisions encumbered her on all sides.

But the canoe from want of ventilation soon became very warm and stuffy. She was so tired with her many miles on snow-shoes that she fell asleep, slumbering dreamlessly through many hours.

When she did awake, it was still pitch dark, and she felt as if she were choking for want of fresh air. At first she could not think where she was, and she put out her hand to grope for her mother, with whom she had slept ever since her father went away. But she hit her hand against a tin cooking pot, which had been hung there overnight to make room for her to lie full length, and it was then that she realized her surroundings.

Groping still, she felt again for the cooking pot, remembering that was where she had put candle and matches. It took her some time to fumble for them, and when at last she got the candle alight and looked at her father's watch,

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which she carried slung by a cord round her neck, she was amazed to find that it was twenty minutes past ten.

'But surely, surely it must be later than that; why I feel as if I had been sleeping all night,' she exclaimed, talking aloud.

Then she heard the distant barking of a dog —at least it sounded distant. So squirming and squirming she at last managed to reach the opening of the tent over the canoe.

A solid wall of snow stood up before her then; but when she thrust the end of her staff through it, she was amazed, bewildered, and appalled to see a streak of daylight showing through the hole.

Was it morning then? And had she been asleep for fourteen hours? They ought to have started on their second day's journey long before this; what could Jerry and Mrs. Tall Pine be thinking of to let her sleep so long?

A little energetic thrusting with the staff widened the aperture sufficiently for her to see that the daylight was of the palest, deadliest kind, and that it was snowing so heavily that she could see nothing but the dense white smother.

'Snowing? Oh, the tracks will be covered and we shall not be able to find our way!' she cried, with a dreadful apprehension striking at her heart. Then she remembered the map, but it did not comfort her very much, because both Jerry and Mrs. Tall Pine thought it probable that her father was being cared

for in an Indian igloo, which might be many miles from the place where he had gone to search for gold. So that now it was possible they might go very far out of their way before they discovered his whereabouts. They might even never find it at all.

Black, hideous dismay wrapped her round. What was she to do? What could she do? Surely it was a mad thing to rush off as she had done, over snow-covered leagues of wilderness. It was like inviting disaster, and now disaster had come. Suppose she perished there in the snow, who would look after her mother and the others?

'No use crossing a bridge until I come to it. I am not dead yet, nor likely to be, if I take common ordinary care,' she said briskly, angry with herself because of that plunge into despair, which was like showing the white feather—a thing she abhorred with all her heart.

Then she shouted and shouted, sending her voice through the raging blizzard with such good effect, that in a very few minutes a shape loomed up through the gloom; and a moment later Mrs. Tall Pine had stuffed her flat, good-natured looking face in at the hole made by Olive's staff, and was announcing rather unnecessarily that 'Snow fall ver' fas.'

'What ever shall we do?' asked Olive anxiously.

'Stay in camp, an' sleep much, snow leave off ver' soon, then march, march all night long,' Mrs. Tall Pine said, with a chuckle.

'The dogs, where are they?' Olive queried, as another distant bark came to her ears.

'They under snow, keep ver' warm there,' announced Mrs. Tall Pine in the same cheerful tone; and then she backed out of the aperture, leaving Olive to her own meditations, which were of the most depressing character.

Hour after hour passed, with never a moment's cessation in the downfall. Surely there had never been a day so long!

Olive spent the time lying snugly in her sleeping sack, and resting as much as she could, for who could tell what need of fierce exertion might be in front of her?

Sometimes the dogs barked; once or twice she heard the Indians shouting to them, but no one came near her, and after a long dreary time, she fell asleep again.

Violent shouting, shaking and thumping aroused her, and when she was fully awake she found it was moonlight while the dark vault of the heavens fairly blazed and glittered with stars. The dogs were barking in riotous delight because the snow had ceased, while Jerry and Mrs. Tall Pine were breaking the canoe out of its snow covering.

In a very few minutes Olive was out of her sleeping sack, and getting her feet through the straps of her snow-shoes, actively assisted in the preparations for a start which were going forward.

What a night it was! The sky fairly flamed with crimson and gold, the air was keen like knives, and the dogs were mad to be off.

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Jerry took the lead to-night. There were no footprints to steer by, and Olive was not clever at steering by the stars. She and Mrs. Tall Pine managed the dogs between them, racing one on either side, while the dogs strained and struggled to keep up with Jerry's flying figure, which was always, always on in front.

The moon came to its southing, but the stars blazed on, and the travellers held steadily to their course, the only sign of life in all that vast white world.

It was quite a hilly country through which they were passing, with forest-clad heights and long valleys, like rivers of whiteness between the black patches of trees. Sometimes they had to climb long steep slopes, but always when they topped the ridge there was an equal slope for descent, and then they fairly flew along, a ghostly, soundless scamper over the frozen fields of snow.

But morning was coming, a slow, reluctant dawn before which the stars paled, and faded out, while Jerry, pausing on the edge of a great forest of spruce trees, said they must stop for a couple of hours to rest the dogs.

Olive and Mrs. Tall Pine gathered sufficient broken and dead boughs of the spruce trees to make a roaring fire, where they cooked a meal which was a great comfort after their fast travel, especially as no fire had been possible on the previous day.

Too anxious to get on to lie down in the canoe and sleep properly, Olive sat with her feet to the fire and her back propped against

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the sledge runners, where she dozed fitfully, and ardently longed for the time to start.

Jerry and his squaw snored peacefully, and had to be awakened by prods from Olive's staff. But once aroused, the Indian cast a hasty glance at the sky above him, then broke into a series of discontented snorts, which were echoed by Mrs. Tall Pine with little squeals of anxiety. Then she told Olive that more snow was coming and the journey would have to be a race against weather to the nearest Indian igloo, which might be perhaps thirty miles distant.

'Can we do it, do you think?' the white girl asked anxiously.

'We must, or we die in snow,' the squaw said, with another wag of her head.

The start was up a long slope with so many lumps sticking up here and there that Olive guessed it must be strewn with rock boulders.

On the top of this slope they came to a wide dreary plain, which stretched for so many miles that it seemed to Olive as if they would never reach the end of it.

It was now that they had to steer by the compass, for the sun had gone in and there was not a landmark of any kind to be seen, only the unbroken field of snow stretching to the horizon on every side.

A fierce wind moaned over the waste; sometimes an errant snowflake dropped upon them, and when this happened Jerry and the squaw would dart forward with fresh energy, the dogs would be hurried to a smarter pace, and

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the journey would become a race, until the dogs dropped slow again.

Olive was desperately weary, and the wind seemed to numb her faculties. She longed to lie down on the snow for just a brief rest. The white covering had such an alluring look, and she was so very, very tired, surely they might rest for a brief half hour.

Unconsciously her pace grew slower and slower, she was hanging forward on her snow-shoes in a highly risky fashion, when suddenly Mrs. Tall Pine stooped for a handful of snow, and rushing up to her, rubbed it violently on her face.

Olive shot out an angry hand to push her away, but the squaw stuck grimly to her task until a hot tingling sensation made her aware that she had been in danger of frost-bite.

The rubbing and the pain banished her overpowering drowsiness for a time; her faculties became clearer; she stood up straight; and thanked Mrs. Tall Pine for her good offices.

'Cht! Cht! That noting, you pull we out from bad pit hole, we tak' care you no freeze. Snow come sharp now, but igloo over in there.'

Olive looked in the direction to which the squaw pointed, and saw what at first she thought to be a line of clouds showing above the horizon. But Mrs. Tall Pine assured her they were hills, big mountains she called them, and Olive's spirits suddenly revived, because the end of that dreadful plain was in sight.

Jerry took the lead again now. Sighting the

hills, he knew how to steer, and discarding the compass he urged the dogs towards a long valley running back into the snow-covered heights, plying whip and voice, until Olive bade him be merciful to the poor brutes.

'It is death that is behind us. Ugh, ugh!' he snorted; and looking round, she saw a thick white haze creeping after them across the plain.

'Ah, the snow is upon us!' she cried, with a swift understanding of the peril that was looming so near; then seizing one of the tow ropes coiled at the back of the sledge, she called to the squaw to take the other, and so to lessen the labour of the straining dogs.

Now indeed it was a race, but the snow cloud travelled the faster.

Turning sharply about three miles up the valley, they entered a narrow defile between towering heights, and here it was that the blizzard overtook them.

Luckily the high hills protected them from the full violence of the wind, or they had perished as they stood.

A little farther they struggled, but every moment the fall became thicker. Olive clinging to the tow rope could not see Jerry nor the dogs. Then there came a wild shriek from Mrs. Tall Pine, and the next moment Olive was jerked violently forward, the rope to which she was clinging dragged her off her feet, and she went down, down, down into the choking deadly whiteness, and knew no more.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD

Under the Barn

ROLAND HERNE was so ill with acute inflammation that Anthony Rawson hurried up the hill, half-an-hour after Olive's start on her journey, to beg that Mrs. Scarth would venture out to see the patient, and give him some instruction in nursing.

'I will come at once,' said Mrs. Scarth, who had been sitting in dumb misery after the wrench of the parting. However depressed she might be, she always felt better if someone had to be helped, and it was a real comfort to know that someone needed her assistance just then.

Clad in a long crimson coat, with a fur-lined hood, which had done duty in more prosperous years as an opera-cloak, Mrs. Scarth slid her feet into snow-pattens, and set out with Anthony for Roland Herne's abode.

They had got down the hill past the hotel, and were heading along the well-beaten trail to the help of the sick man, when they saw a mean, ragged object hurrying towards them, and gesticulating wildly.

'Why, the poor old man must be mad! See how he is flourishing about!' cried Mrs. Scarth, in some alarm.

'Never mind, come a little quicker, and we shall get out of his way,' said Anthony, eager to get her clear away from what might be an unpleasant scene, for he fancied that he recognized the individual as So' Fry, and guessed that there might be a lively scene impending. It was only guess-work, of course, for the Indian had indulged in no confidences; indeed Anthony had invited none, being most especially anxious not to know how the affair of hiring the dogs had been managed.

'No, indeed. The children are alone, you know, and if the man is going to the store, we must go back with him,' Mrs. Scarth said, waxing valiant in defence of her brood, just because Olive, who was her strong stand-by, was not at home.

But Sol Fry had no intention of climbing the hill to the store if he could transact his business where he was; so he advanced upon Mrs. Scarth almost at a run, crying indignantly, 'Where are my dogs? I say, why did you steal my dogs?'

Instinctively she shrank nearer to Anthony, who at once put out his hand in protecting fashion, while he said to the indignant old man, 'Don't you see that you are frightening the lady? What is it that you want?'

'I want my dogs, do you hear?' screamed Sol Fry, who was nearly beside himself with rage and fear of losing the value of his animals.

'What does he mean?' demanded Mrs. Scarth, in all simplicity turning to Anthony.

But it was Sol who enlightened her, scream-

ing worse than ever, and pointing a shaking hand at prints of dogs' feet here and there at the sides of the trail.

'My four dogs have been stolen, I say. They were all right when I went to bed last night, and this morning they are nowhere to be seen. People are saying that that mannish daughter of yours—'

'Keep a civil tongue in your head, will you?' said Anthony quietly, but advancing upon the irate old fellow with such determination in look and gesture that Sol, who was an arrant coward, immediately began to cringe and grovel.

'I'm a poor man, a very poor man,' he whined, snuffling in a horridly unpleasant fashion. 'They are saying that Miss Scarth stole my dogs to go in search of her father, and I'm asking humbly that you'll not see me wronged out of the price of my dogs' hire.'

'My daughter did not steal your dogs; she would not stoop to such meanness,' burst out Mrs. Scarth, looking as ruffled as a mother hen whose chickens have been tampered with.

Then Anthony interposed, for this was his business in a certain measure.

'Miss Scarth had nothing to do with hiring the dogs; she did not even know they were going to be hired,' he said, speaking in a calmly dictatorial tone which fairly made the old man squirm. 'It was I who engaged the Indian and his squaw to be escort for Miss Scarth, and I instructed him to hire dogs, saying that I would be responsible for the money. But I told him that the dogs must be

ready to time, or part of his pay would be forfeited. So I suppose he was afraid you would refuse, and took them without asking, which was really the simpler process, seeing that the journey had to be undertaken in a great hurry to save life, and a few hours' delay were of very serious importance.'

'Then you'll see me paid?' demanded Sol Fry.

'Of course, that was my arrangement with the Indian when I told him to get the dogs,' replied Anthony.

'But folks said you were poor, and they made a collection for you,' burst out the old man suspiciously.

'Which collection you tried to steal,' remarked Anthony with a smile, whereat Sol squirmed in indignant denial. But the other went on, waving aside his interruption, 'You can depend upon me for the hire of the team, at the proper time, that is if you go about your business quietly, and don't annoy this lady; otherwise I may be tempted to dig that old affair up again for the benefit of the police, and then you and your precious saloon would be wiped out of Orsay sharp, and no very great pity either.'

Sol was abject. He was shrewd enough to know a real man when he saw one, and he had taken Anthony's measure correctly enough. So he grovelled before Mrs. Scarth, grovelled anew in front of her companion, and then to their relief betook himself back by the way he had come, in a very much calmer frame of mind.

'It was dreadful of Jerry to steal those dogs,' commented Mrs. Scarth, picking her way along the trail with a dainty pat, pat, of the awkward square pattens.

'It would have been much more dreadful if Miss Scarth had been obliged to tow the sledge all those miles,' replied Anthony calmly. 'I had an idea that I could trust Jerry to do his part properly, and I am glad that he did not disappoint me.'

Roland Herne was ill, but not so bad as Anthony in his ignorance had believed him to be. A mustard plaster, applied by Mrs. Scarth, soon relieved his suffering, and a neighbour who could not work because of the snow, happening along for a gossip, was pressed into service as sick-nurse for the time, which left Anthony free to go back to the store and help Gretchen, who was ready to drop from want of sleep.

There was keen anxiety next day when the snow began. But as all the worrying in the world could not make Olive's journey easier, and they all knew that the Indians could take better care of her than white people under similar conditions, they tried to make the best of it, and forget their fears in hard work.

Gretchen complained that the golden syrup froze solid in the store, while canned pineapples were also blocks of ice; and Anthony volunteered to dig a pit at the back of the barn, as a sort of warm storage for goods which should be liquid or semi-liquid.

'But are you strong enough? Digging in

frightfully hard work,' said Gretchen with a sigh, remembering the toilsome days of last spring, when the town-lots had to be cultivated for crops of potatoes and beans.

'I am going to do it, then I can find out if I am strong enough as I go along,' replied Anthony, with quite an hilarious air. The mail had come in on the previous day, and there were letters for him from England. Kindly encouraging letters, too. The old aunts had recovered from the fit of anger, which made them cast him off when he threw up his chance of a career to go in search of his erring brother. Now they were writing to tell him that his future was as much their concern as it had been in the past, and if he chose to settle in the country in which he had been travelling for so many months, they would be quite willing to advance what money he might need for starting in life for himself.

It was the thought of having won back the love of the old ladies, who had been so direly offended with him, which made his mood so bright and gay on the morning when he started to dig a hole in the floor of the barn. His strength was coming back to him by slow degrees, but he was only a tyro at digging, and so it did not take very long before he was bathed in perspiration, and he marvelled that things could freeze solid in a place which to him seemed so hot and stuffy.

For six days he toiled at shaping his hole into some sort of a cellar, about five feet deep and six feet square, only the trouble was to get

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it square ; and it was while he was busy trying to shape one obstinate corner, just a week after Olive went away, that he made his great discovery.

Gretchen was in the house helping her mother with some cooking, when she heard him shouting, and she rushed off to the store under the impression that he must have broken his leg, or arm, or that some other kind of disaster must have taken place.

' Oh, what is it ? What is it ? ' she cried, fully prepared to be as sympathetic as possible, but wondering whatever they would do if anything really bad had happened while Olive was away.

' Something tremendously good ! ' he shouted. ' Guess what I've found down in that hole ! ' he exclaimed, with a backward wave of his hand as he stood on the ladder, a dirty, untidy figure, panting and perspiring from his exertions.

' Copper ? ' shrieked Gretchen, ready to start on a Wild Indian dance of delight.

But he shook his head, and tried to look lugubrious. ' No, I haven't seen a trace of copper, though I have looked for it carefully enough. But you can't find what isn't here to be found, you know,' and he sighed like a pair of bellows.

' Oh, please, please tell me, and don't tease ! ' implored Gretchen, with a sound in her voice as if she were actually on the verge of tears.

' Come down and see,' he said, sliding down into the hole to make room for her on the ladder, and his face was radiant with satisfaction as he stood looking up at her.

Gretchen hated dark holes, and things of that sort, and for a whole minute she hesitated, trying to screw up her courage for the descent; then she asked nervously, 'Is there anything alive down there?'

'Yes, I am alive, very much so, thank you,' he answered promptly, and there was a hint of banter in his tone, as he asked, 'Don't you really want to know what I have found?'

'Of course I do, but it is so dark down there, and I do hate deep dark places. I am always so afraid of stepping into water, or something of that sort,' she said timorously.

'I give you my word of honour that there is no water here; it is dry as bones. Come along, I'll steady the ladder,' he said encouragingly; and with a worried sigh she stepped forward and prepared to descend.

'Oh, dear, what a horrid place, and it is so deep down!' she said with a gasp, as she stepped off the ladder, and stood shivering by his side in the big hole he had scooped out with so much labour and pains.

Silently he lifted his lantern, and held it so that the light fell full upon one corner of the hole he had worked so hard to square—the corner which had given him more work than all the other three put together.

'What is it?' she asked, seeing nothing but greyish white stone.

'Silver!' he answered, and there was positive awe in his tone.

'Oh—oh—oh!' she gasped; then burst in tremulous tones, 'But are you sure? Are yo—'

quite, quite sure? I would rather not believe it at all, than have to be disappointed a second time.'

'I have been in silver mines in Ontario, and in British Columbia too, but of course I am not an expert,' he answered. 'I tell you what I think I had better do. I will take some samples of this stuff in my pocket, and start off to Wernside to-morrow if it is fine. There are plenty of miners there who would tell me all I want to know, and that without having their curiosity roused. And until I have been, and we know a little more about it, perhaps it would be as well for us to say nothing to anyone about what we have found.'

'So I think,' Gretchen answered promptly; then she burst out, 'But I am sure that you are not fit to go to Wernside; why, it is thirty miles away, and you are not a bit strong. You were downright ill yesterday, only you would not own to it.'

Anthony made a wry face, for he was one of those men who simply loathe the imputation of feebleness; and in spite of himself there was a rasp in his voice as he replied, 'Oh, I know I'm not much to boast of from a physical point of view, but I'll get to Wernside somehow, even if I have to pay a couple of men to haul me there on a wood-sledge, and if I'm right about this ore, I'll go and register in your mother's name; then she will be all right, whatever may happen.'

'But seeing that you made the discovery, could you not register in your own name?

I mean the silver is yours even though it is on our land, seeing that you found it," she said nervously.

'Do you think me such an unutterable cad?' he asked, so fiercely that Gretchen shrank away from him in affright. But he went on in a gentler tone, 'Here I have been living for weeks and weeks on the generosity of you all, giving you no end of trouble and anxiety, having the best you had to give, while you all went short that I might have luxuries, and now when I'm at last on my feet again, you think that I would take a rascally advantage like this, of snatching from you what is yours by right.'

'No, no, I never thought such a thing!' burst out Gretchen impetuously. 'I only reminded you that you could do it if you liked which is a very different thing.'

'Well, I do not like, so that is settled once and for all. Now are you going to be able to keep this a secret for a day or two, or will it bother you too much?'

'Oh, I shall not say anything about it simply because I do not mean to believe that it is silver,' she said, with an air of deep disgust. 'If I once gave way and allowed myself to believe it, I should go fairly wild with delight so the best thing is to give no credence to it.'

'Just so,' he said with a laugh; 'and now with your permission, we will just arrange a few packing cases down here, with canned fruits and that sort of thing, just to give a good and sufficient reason for having a hole in the

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place, and we will cover it over with boards so that it may attract as little notice as possible.'

Gretchen nodded acquiescence, then climbed the ladder, thankful indeed to get up to the floor level once more.

There was half-an-hour of very hard work in lowering cases and tins into the hole, so that the vein of ore might be hidden from the prying eyes of anyone who might chance to be strolling about the store. Then they put boards over the hole, and on the top of these, they heaped a layer of miscellaneous articles, such as buckets, washing trays and other light but cumbersome goods, which must of necessity find a place in every back-country store.

Acting on second thoughts, which are most often the best, Anthony did not go back to Wernside the next day, but instead went down creek in the sledge of a man who had business at the town twenty miles down. It was a town so-called, but in reality it was no whit bigger, and hardly more important, than Orsay, although it had a bank, and an office for claim registration and other business connected with the taking up and the using of the land, with other matters pertaining to property.

The bank was a wooden shack with a shingle roof—not very palatial premises; but Anthony turned his steps towards it in great satisfaction because there was a bank at all.

His first business was to open an account with a very substantial deposit, which his

aunts, the Misses Hillyer, had remitted to him from England in token of their forgiveness; and while the manager was still smiling over this addition to the bank's customers, Anthony laid a great lump of ore before him, and asked quietly, 'What is it?'

The manager looked at it, took it up in his hands, examined it carefully, then laid it on the counter again. 'Silver without a doubt,' he said concisely.

'Good; then I'll go and register,' returned Anthony.

'Say, where did you locate it?' asked the manager.

But Anthony only shook his head, refusing to be drawn; and making his way next to the registration office, he made Mrs. Scarth's claim secure, to mine for silver on the property of her husband, Jacob Scarth.

Then staying only to buy the best team of dogs to be had for money in the town, and hiring a driver to take care of them, because he did not consider himself capable of managing the big brutes, he set off back to Orsay as fast as his new property would travel, which was very fast indeed. He and the driver were packed into a gaily painted sledge, with two pairs of new snow-shoes sticking out at the rear. They stopped at the abode of Roland Herne, who consented to take in both driver and dogs as lodgers for the time being, and the Anthony walked up the hill with such an elation in his tread as he had not known for many a long and weary month.

If Olive did not come back in the course of a day or two, he meant to go after her, and it was for this purpose he had bought the dogs. Roland Herne was getting better fast, and could be trusted to give some sort of protection to Mrs. Scarth and the children.

'Anything can be done for money—or almost anything,' he said a little grimly; but the grimness was all because of the things which Olive had had to do and to suffer through lack of money to make her way easier.

'But there will be an end to all that now,' he said to himself, panting a little as he climbed the hill. He was eager as a schoolboy to tell his news, and he pictured the look on Mrs. Scarth's face, the light in Gretchen's eyes, and the uproarious happiness of Bluey and Benny, when they heard the great news of the silver find.

Of course the vein might not be a big one, but in any case the Scarths would be better off, and probably Orsay would boom again, so that they would be able to sell their land at almost any price they liked to ask for it.

So absorbed was he in all these pleasant thoughts, that he was close to the house before he noticed a sledge and a dog team in the open space just beyond.

It was the canoe on runners, so Olive had come, and the ejaculation of rapture which rose to his lips ended in what sounded like a sob.

The dogs were all lying on the snow as if absolutely exhausted. But he did not pause to look at them; instead he burst in at the door of

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the house, with no ceremony of knocking, for he too must have his share in the joyful welcome that would be given to Olive.

But his first glance into the kitchen, that looked so dark after the glitter of the snowy world outside, showed him that it was bitter sorrow, and not joy, which was the result of the home-coming.

'Ah, poor Scarth is dead!' he said to himself, with a sharp intake of his breath, and a pang of pity at his heart because of the grief the family would feel.

He heard a sound of wailing from the rocking-chair in which Mrs. Scarth was crouched, while Gretchen hung over her in limp and helpless distress. But Olive was not visible.

Jerry, the Indian, stood in the centre of the floor, statuesque and solemn, and to him Anthony turned for the explanation, which he could not ask from the others.

'What is it? And where is Miss Olive?' he demanded.

'Miss Olive, not here, ugh, ugh!' grunted Jerry. 'She—'

But Anthony, to his disgust, was overtaken by a sudden weakness which made his sense reel, while a horror of black darkness confronted him.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH

Henceforth and Forever

SHARP, horrible pain, which seemed to attack her from all points at once, brought Olive back to her senses again; then she became conscious of strong, acrid smoke, filling her throat and her eyes, she saw dimly a great fire leaping and blazing, while dusky forms hovered about her, pinching, punching and rubbing.

At first she wondered what they were doing, and was minded to cry out against the intolerable pain of it all, only she felt too weak and tired for even such a little effort, and was drifting down, down into insensibility again, when a voice somewhere near asked anxiously, 'Isn't she beginning to show signs of life yet?'

Her father's voice! It was, it must be! Olive struggled to regain possession of her faculties, fought, struggled, as surely she had never fought or struggled before. There was a sobbing cry of gladness from someone, it sounded like Mrs. Tall Pine, and then the pain assailed Olive again more fiercely than before.

'Oh, stop, stop, you hurt me so!' she tried to shout, but was horrified to find her voice only a feeble whisper.

Then her head was lifted up, something hot,

strong and incredibly nasty was poured down her throat, she was half-choked, and had to fight for her breath as a few moments before she had fought for her senses. But she was getting better, and when she tried to shout again, it was a real voice and not a whisper which sounded to her ears. 'Stop, stop, you hurt me so!' she cried out; then another voice exclaimed:

'Olive, Olive! My brave, darling child!'

'Father, where are you?' she sobbed, and a gush of tears cleared her eyes, and strengthened her mental vision; she even tried to struggle to a sitting posture, pushing away the two or three dusky women who, with Mrs. Tall Pine to urge them on, were scouring her hands and face with snow. 'Father, Father, where are you?' she cried again; and then they lifted her up, carrying her round what seemed an angle in the wall, and putting her gently down beside an emaciated figure, wrapped in a rug, and lying on a bed of spruce boughs.

Was this her father? This man with ghastly white face, and long unkempt beard?

'Olive, Olive!' he murmured; and then she knew him, stretching out her tortured hands to touch his face with her fingers.

'Father, my dearest father, what have they done to you?' she cried, kissing his thin white hands, because she could not reach his face.

'They have been very good to me, child, or I must have died long ago,' he said so feebly that she remembered all at once that he was ill, and must not over-exert himself.

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'Don't talk now, dear, or you will overtax yourself,' she said with gentle persuasion, while she rubbed her aching hands together, and tried to quicken her circulation. If only she could get rid of that horrible numbness and torturing pain, she would be able to get up and look after her father, who appeared to be lying in a woeful state of dirt and neglect.

Her strength was coming back to her: very soon she would be all right again. She did not understand how they had got into this place at all, which seemed too big for an igloo, and was more like a big cave. But she had heard one of the dogs bark, she had seen Jerry pass on the other side of the fire, and so she guessed that they had all been rescued from the fury of the blizzard which had overtaken them on the way.

In spite of her determination to be up and doing with as little delay as possible, she was so warm and comfortable in the skins which the Indian women had wrapped round her, that she fell asleep and lay for many hours in sound slumber.

When she awoke the fire was still burning, but no one was visible moving about, so she supposed that it was night, and she put out her hand to grope for her father.

His skin was dry, and burning with fever; he was delirious too, and talking, talking, talking to her mother and the others. He seemed to be bandying jokes with Dora, to be encouraging Gretchen, and then he would suddenly break off to tell a fairy story to Bluey and

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Benny, which brought tears to Olive's eyes as she listened.

She was realizing what effects the weeks and months of solitude must have had upon him, and more and more she was wondering why he had not made an effort to come home before; why he had let that man Jules Webling take the canoe and start back for civilization, without any letter for the anxious wife and family waiting at home.

Struggling to her knees, she crawled closer to him, thankful to find that although she was stiff and sore from head to foot there was nothing else the matter with her.

Gently and tenderly she talked to him, until presently his raving and moaning ceased; and then after lying for a few moments in silence, he asked in a bewildered tone, 'Are you really here, Olive? Or is it a dream like the rest?'

'I am really here, dear father, and I have come to take you home,' she said, stroking his face while she talked to him, so that he might understand that she was real flesh and blood and not merely a creature of his dreams.

'I should not live to reach home, for I have been ill for months,' he said weakly. 'I had a fall that day, after poor Webling started off on that fishing trip from which he never came back, and I've never been fit for much since. Indeed I must have died long ago, only when the Indians came at the beginning of the cold weather they nursed me up a little, and I tried my best to get well.'

'You will get better quickly now, never fear,'

she interposed in a cheery fashion, understanding how hopeless his mood was, and guessing that this was a very important factor in his inability to get well. She began to talk to him about home, and her mother; she even made him laugh by telling him some of the funny experiences which had come to Gretchen and herself since they had started keeping store.

By the time she had talked him into a refreshing sleep, the Indians were beginning to stir again, and then Olive found that she was furiously hungry.

Routing up Jerry, who was sleeping by a fire in another cave which opened out of the one in which her father was lying, she asked about the canoe, and found to her delight that it had been brought into the caves with the dogs on the previous evening. Indeed Jerry told her that the place where she fell was down the steep incline leading to the entrance of the cave, but the reason that she so nearly succumbed to the cold was because just at first they did not know that she had fallen, and then they had to hunt for her in the white smother, and it was nearly an hour before they found her.

Olive had condensed milk among the invalid comforts packed into the lading of the canoe, and it was a cup of real bread and milk which she roused her father to take when she had satisfied her own hunger.

He was not quite so hopeless when he had eaten it, but he still insisted that he should die on the homeward journey; and judging from

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her own experiences on the way, Olive dared not risk making the attempt to move him until she had nursed him into a little more strength.

One day she waited to see how he was; then being frightened by his extreme prostration, she wrote a long letter to her mother, telling her the exact state of the case, and saying that it would be necessary to wait two, perhaps three weeks, before starting on the homeward journey. But she could not keep the dogs with her for so long as there would be no provision for them, so she was going to send Jerry back with them, and she begged that they might be sent again in two weeks.

The thought of the expense was a dreadful worry to her. But it must be met somehow, even if Dora had to be asked to help make it up from her salary at Redway Falls.

For two days it snowed so badly, that Jerry could not start. Then came a change of weather, the sun shone for a brief hour in the short winter day, and the nights were brilliant beyond description.

Jerry set off then, and Olive settled down to her waiting, fighting hard against the host of worries which oppressed her, and nursing her father with a zest and carefulness which made him begin to get better in spite of himself.

One thing surprised her very much, and that was that he said nothing about the gold. She would not mention the subject to him at first. On the day after Jerry went away it dropped out inadvertently.

She and Mrs. Tall Pine had been very busy

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all that morning, making a fresh bed for the invalid, and establishing him in more comfortable quarters. A series of caves running in under the hills made a fairly warm habitation, and there were about twenty Indians wintering there, because the place was more convenient than any igloo and quite as warm. The entrances were nearly blocked with snow, only a very small aperture being left for egress and ingress. Olive and her father were located at one end of the series, and as they had a fire to themselves, they were fairly removed from their neighbours. Mrs. Tall Pine spent most of her time with them, only paying visits to her clan when they gathered round the supper fire, to spin endless yarns about nothing in particular.

Olive had been telling her father about the canoe coming down the creek to the Point, and the bewilderment which had come to her to find so many things her father would never think of using in the lading; and then she described how the men had come to look at the gold, while the man from Alaska pronounced it to be 'false hope,' and nothing more.

A deep sigh came from Mr. Scarth, and he said quickly, 'Ah, I was right then. I have had my doubts about it being real gold, because there was so much of it, and it seemed to go in veins among the earth instead of lying in nuggets. I said the same to Webling, but he held to it that it must be gold.'

'Where did you meet with that man, Jules Webling, father?' asked Olive.

' He was here when I came, child, and seemed disposed to resent my arrival. But I guessed he was the man who had stolen the letter, and I taxed him with it, then he owned up. It seemed he plunged into the water and swam to the school-house, when he found the water had reached it, hoping to save you, but you had been got out by that time. Then he pulled open the desk to see if that were worth saving, and the letter was there; he took it, read it, and then acted upon it. He told me that his only excuse was that he cared for you.'

Olive uttered an exclamation of impatience, then burst out: ' Father, why did you let that man have your canoe to come home in, yet never send a letter to tell us how you were or what you were doing? ' Olive asked, with unconscious reproach in her tone.

' He didn't have it to come home in,' Mr. Scarth explained. ' We used to take it in turn to go fishing and shooting in the swamps which lie out beyond, for in summer they simply swarm with water-fowl, while very good fish indeed is to be had from some of the deeper pools and creeks. Then one day he went out and he didn't come back, so I could only believe that disaster had come to him. But I could not go to search because, of course, I had no canoe. He had borrowed my watch too, because his own was broken, and I had let him have my compass, because he was such a duffer at finding his way back when he went off foraging.'

' I am afraid that he was worse than a duf-

fer: he must have been a traitor, and deliberately went away, leaving you to your fate in the wilderness,' Olive said sternly.

'It looks like it, certainly, but why trouble about him?' asked Mr. Scarth. 'He is beyond the reach of human judgment, and if he was a traitor, his treachery returned upon his own head, seeing that he lost his life while mine has been most wonderfully preserved; and do you know, I really begin to believe that I shall get better.'

'Of course you are going to get better, and when you go home you can spend a long convalescence in writing a series of articles on your experiences gold-hunting in the wilderness, while Gretchen and I rake in the dollars at store-keeping,' Olive replied, with determined cheerfulness, resolutely banishing her worries to the background.

She had need of all her courage in the dreary days which followed. The darkness of the caves got upon her nerves and she felt as if she would die from want of fresh air; but if she only ventured out for an hour of snow-shoeing, to help bring in firewood from the forests stretching away to the north, her father fretted so at her absence that she felt miserable at leaving him.

Still it was necessary to keep herself in practice at snow-shoeing, in view of the homeward journey, and so she went out daily, unless the weather was very bad indeed.

'Only six days more, and then we may look for Jerry back again,' she said to her father,

as they whiled away one of the long dreary evenings, sitting talking by their fire, while from the farther caves came intermittently the sound of the Indians talking around the supper fires.

' Only six days more,' the invalid said, with a long breath which was betwixt a sigh and a sob; and he was opening his lips to speak again, when there arose a mighty commotion in the outer caves, the shrill voices of the squaws, the deeper gutturals of the men, crying of frightened children, and a wild barking of dogs.

But as the Indians often had these outbursts of noise about next to nothing at all, Olive took no notice of it, and remarked to her father how funny it was that they were never troubled with smoke, although there was no visible egress for it.

' Oh, there are chinks in the roof, and it escapes in that way,' replied her father.

' Miss Scarth, where are you ? ' a man's voice rang through the uproar, and Olive sprang to her feet with a cry of gladness, for it was Anthony Rawson who called. A moment later he came striding through the gloom of the caves to their fire, and she moved towards him as if she were in a dream.

' How did you get here ? Did you snow-shoe back with Jerry ? ' she asked, letting him take both her hands in his, and quite forgetting to be self-conscious in her joy at seeing him again.

' I'm afraid I was lazy and rode most of the way, but I am going to snow-shoe back again,

so that you may ride. I've got a team of dogs and a sledge of my own now, you see,' he explained; and then he shook hands with Mr. Scarth, and said that the journey was nothing when one got used to it.

Olive looked at him in surprise. He had entirely dropped the invalid air, and was looking so bright and alert that she had to form a fresh mental picture of him.

The dogs would not be fit to travel by the next day, he told her, but by the day after that they might hope to take the trail, provided the weather was such as to make travelling possible.

'Your mother says that we must take the risk of your father suffering from the journey, for she is quite sure that he will not get better cooped up in a cave. And if we don't bring him this time, she will come herself in spite of everything,' Anthony Rawson said, as he surveyed Olive, and thought how the journey and the anxiety had worn her.

'Poor mother, life has been so hard for her, but she has been brave about it!' Olive murmured.

'Someone else has found life hard and has borne herself bravely,' said Anthony, with an inflection in his tone which set her pulses fluttering and rushed a tide of blushes over her face, right up to the roots of her hair.

She hurried to get supper for him and his dog-driver, who, being a white man, could not be left to feed with the Indians; but when the meal was over, the man went off to arrange quar-

ters for the night, leaving Anthony sitting by the fire with Mr. Scarth and Olive.

'I fancy you are going to be a rich man after all, sir,' said Anthony, leaning forward and speaking in a gentle deferential tone to the invalid.

'I think not. The probabilities are that I shall be a very poor one.' Mr. Scarth stirred a little uneasily as he spoke, and Olive, against whose shoulder he was leaning, felt him shudder convulsively, which made her flash a reproachful look at Anthony.

'You are thinking of this gold that has cost you so much to find, and is proving to be only "false hope" after all,' said the young man; 'but I have got some news for you which is downright surprising. We have struck a vein of silver under your barn at Orsay, and although of course it is impossible at this stage to estimate its value, I think it is safe to say that there is no need for you to be poor again for the remainder of your life.'

'It is like the irony of fate!' exclaimed Mr. Scarth, gripping one of Olive's hands so tightly that it fairly hurt her, while he gazed at Anthony as if even now he could not believe the good news true. 'To think that I should have come so far and toiled so long in vain, while all the time there was wealth waiting for me under my very feet. I might have stayed at home and spared myself and my family all the trouble and sorrow that have come to us.'

'In that case we should have sold the land at the time of the copper boom, and there

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would have been an end of it,' said Olive. 'Don't you think, dear father, it is just a wonderful instance of how our blackest disasters may turn into blessings in disguise ?'

"It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes," quoted Mr. Scarth reverently; and then he asked Olive to help him to his bed place, because he wanted to be alone.

They both assisted him, for he was still so weak that it was a matter of difficulty to walk those few steps; and when he was warmly covered, they came back to the fire.

A self-consciousness crept over Olive then, and she rushed into talk about anything and everything, just to stave off the silences that would come in spite of her efforts, for Anthony seemed disinclined for anything, except to sit staring at her, which was distinctly embarrassing to her in her present mood.

'I have some more news for you; would you like to hear it?' he asked abruptly.

'Of course, if it is good, not unless, for we must not spoil the flavour of to-night,' she said with attempted lightness.

'My two good aunts have taken me back into their affections again. They have re-made the wills which they destroyed when I threw up everything to search for Cyril, and so my future is settled for me,' he said quietly.

Olive winced, and turned pale. It was not good news he was giving her, but bad, because of course he would go to England now, and they would not see him again.

'I am very glad for you,' she said, but her

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voice sounded cold and formal, while to her confusion she could not help it shaking; 'and I hope you will be very happy.'

'Thank you, but my happiness will depend upon you,' he said, so quietly that, by no means understanding the import of his words, she asked in a surprised tone—

'What have I to do with it?'

He laughed then, and taking her hand, held it fast. 'I can't be happy unless I can have you for myself, henceforth and for ever. Will you say yes, Olive?'

But for a good long time she said nothing at all, and when at last she did speak, her words sounded irrelevant.

'I don't see how I can go to England and leave them all to manage for themselves.'

'That is just what I thought,' he said cheerfully, edging a little nearer to her. 'So as the aunts are making it possible for me to start a business career for myself on this side of the world, it struck me that I could not do better than ask your father to take me as a partner in this silver venture of his.'

'Oh, what a relief; do you really mean it?' she asked.

'If you mean it,' he answered; then silence dropped between them again.

* * * *

The homeward journey was managed successfully. The weather fortunately kept fine, and the halts were only long enough to rest the dogs.

Everyone in Orsay turned up to give Mr.

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Scarth a welcome home, and when the news of the silver find leaked out, the place boomed again. Business grew active, and Ezra Pratt came over from Wernside to inquire if Olive would hand over the store to him again.

'Yes, indeed,' she answered. 'I was wondering if you would think it worth while, and something will have to be done with it quickly, because the barn must be cleared at the end of the week. But what will you do for premises? Shall I have to bundle Roland Herne out of your old house?'

'Not much!' he ejaculated, with a nasal drawl worthy of a fully-fledged Yankee. 'Mrs. Pratt said that if you were willing to hand over the business, she'd like me to buy the hotel site, and I've got the refusal of it, so Roland is welcome to the shack as long as he pays rent for it.'

'I am very glad,' said Olive. 'We should all hate to have an hotel just there, but a store is quite a different matter.'

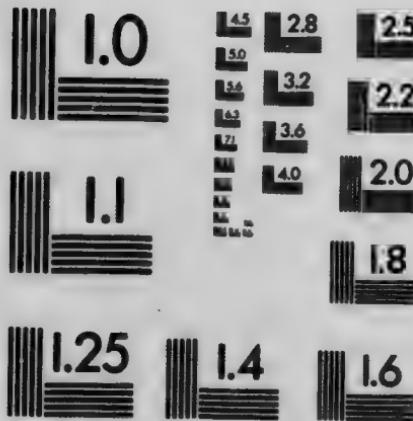
'You've heard the news about Jeff?' Ezra asked, turning back after he had taken leave.

'No. Oh, I hope he has not broken out again?' she cried, in quick distress.

Ezra shook his head. 'No more fear of that, he took small-pox and died last week. A downright good fellow he was, barring his weak spot. I'm afraid he'd done a bit of harm in his time, but it's certain he tried to straighten things up between whiles, and he died at his post like a hero. Oh, yes, there was a deal of good in him down underneath.'



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'What are you crying for, Olive?' Anthony asked, coming along unexpectedly just after Ezra Pratt had gone.

'I am glad and sorry too,' she answered, when she had told him about Jeff, 'for now he cannot fall again.'

* * * *

Dora came home a few weeks later, radiant with happiness because of her father's return, but with a curious change in her mental outlook.

'I thought I should be utterly and entirely happy if only we could be rich,' she said, as she and Olive brushed their hair in the bedroom which they shared with Gretchen and Bluey on the first night of her home-coming. 'But after all money is only a detail: it is the other things which matter most.'

'Such as——?' queried Olive, smiling at Dora's change of front.

'Oh, I can't express it all, I'm not made that way. But I would rather be noble and unselfish as you are, than have the biggest fortune in the world.'

THE END.

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